UFO to hold Christmas Lantern Competition. PAGE 2
EPA certifies two BECQ lab officers in Microbiology. PAGE 6

Hafa Adai!

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Saipan Tribune

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'NMI community faces no threat'

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Pangelinan

The Chinese national that was the subject of various social media posts that insinuated a public community threat over the weekend remains at large. However, the Department of Public Safety has assured that the community does not face any imminent danger.

See NMI on Page 4

MILITARY BURIAL CONTRIBUTED PHOTO

After nearly a year of not having any family members claim his body, U.S. Marine Corps veteran PFC Daniel Martinez was finally given a proper military burial yesterday at the Veteran's Cemetary in Marpi. The burial was handled by the Office of Veterans Affairs. Martinez's body laid unclaimed at the Commonwealth Health Center morgue for almost a year. The OVA made the arrangements to have Martinez be given a proper burial. Three U.S. Marines from Guam flew in yesterday morning to give the veteran military honors. No further information was immediately available as of press time yesterday.

AD names transition team leaders, members

» Propst tasked to oversee transition at DPS; Sablan at IRP, OPD; Staffler at Labor, NMTI
» Ex-lieutenant governor Villagomez named member of CUC transition team

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Governor-elect Arnold I. Palacios and lieutenant-governor-elect David M. Apatang named yesterday their transition team leaders, including Rep. Edwin K. Propst (D-Saipan), who is tasked to oversee the transition process at the Department of Public Safety

See AD on Page 4

TRIP Japan off to a slow start

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The program to restart Japanese tourism to the CNMI, which officially launched last Sept. 1, is off to a slow start, with the numbers of inbound tourists being less than what was anticipated at the start of the program.

This was learned during the Marianas Visitors Authority's annual membership meeting last week at the Pacific Islands Club Saipan, during which Takashi Ichikura, MVA Japan Office head and Access Inc.,

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'Non-certification of runoff results hampering transition committees' movement'

Former representative Juan I. "Liling" Reyes, overall chairman of the transition and inauguration committees, answers questions from reporters during a press conference at the committees' headquarters in Susupe yesterday morning. Also in the photo to Reyes left is former House of Representatives speaker Oscar M. Babauta, who is vice chairman for the Inauguration Subcommittee, and former representative Claudio K. Norita, vice chairman of the Transition Subcommittee. FERDIE DE LA TORRE

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Former representative Juan I. "Liling" Reyes, who is the overall chairman of the transition and inauguration committees, said yesterday that the Commonwealth Election Commission board's non-certification of the runoff gubernatorial race results has been hampering their movement.

In a news briefing at the

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INSIDE

BUSINESS
Saipan Studio teaches the magic of dance through dance education for children and adults.

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OVERDRIVE
When something delivers more than you'd expect, like the 2023 Hyundai Elantra Hybrid, it's a delight.

PAGE 14

LIFE & STYLE
Forty years later, Ke Huy Quan is a star, again in "Everything Everywhere All at Once."

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Local

UFO to hold Christmas Lantern Competition

By CHRYSTAL MARINO
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CORRESPONDENT

As part of its celebration of *Paskong Pinoy* 2022 in the CNMI, the United Filipino Organization would be holding an on-the-spot *parol* (Christmas lantern) making contest at the Marianas Business Plaza this Sunday, Dec. 18, 2022. The contest will be held in the plaza's covered parking area and is open to everyone.

All lantern entries will go through a judging panel and will be chosen based on originality, workmanship, relevance to Christmas (*pasko*) celebration, presentation and overall appearance.

The first-place prize is $300; the second-place winner will get $200, while third place will get $100. The judges have yet to be announced.

UFO stated in its social media page that the main objective of the competition is to "...encourage organizations and individuals to continue the creation of the Christmas symbol in the Philippines which graces the windows, doorways and streets during this holiday season. This also provides a venue for artistic expression among *kababayan* [compatriots]."

Traditional or modern *parols* will be accepted but the *parol* must have a five-point star design, and innovative or stylish design.

The lantern's frame can be bamboo or any bamboo substitute, and its cover can be paper or any material, including recycled or indigenous material. No commercially produced *parol* may be entered in the contest (e.g. made of capiz or other material/or *parol* manufactured in the Philippines).

Its size must be no less than a foot in diameter and no greater than three feet across, excluding the tassels or tail. It must be capable of being hung or may be propped up on a pole that can be carried. Although not required, participants may add an electric or battery-operated lights to the *parol*, excluding candles.

The Christmas lanterns must be handmade at the venue location. The competition will begin at 10am and all submissions must be completed by 3pm for the judging panel. Group participants as well as individuals are welcome to join, but only one entry will be allowed per group or individual.

If you are interested to join the contest, contact Paskong Pinoy 2022 event organizers Mar Masilungan (president) at 483-9440, Birhen Martinez (secretary) at 483-0915, Annamae Adaza (UFO past president) at 285-4388 or any of the UFO officers to register.

Registrations on the day of the event will also be accepted from 9am to 10am.

For more information, check United Filipino Organization–CNMI Facebook page.

'THANK YOU'
Outgoing treasurer Michael S. Johnson of the Hotel Association of the Northern Mariana Islands, third from left, is thanked for his service and presented with a plaque of appreciation by the HANMI board of directors on Dec. 9, 2022, at Crown Plaza Resort Saipan. Johnson served as HANMI treasurer for over a decade. From left, legal counsel Marcia Schultz, board member Robert Coates, Johnson, chairman Ivan Quichocho, vice chairman Seo, and board member Guillaume Delemarle. HANMI

IN CASE OF MAN ACCUSED OF RAPING MINOR

Defense wants case dismissed 'with prejudice'

By KIMBERLY B. ESMORES
kimberly_esmores@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

The defense counsel for a man accused of raping a minor at a beach in Susupe want the Superior Court to dismiss the lawsuit against his client "with prejudice" instead of "without," as requested by the prosecution.

Attorney Robert T. Torres, the defense counsel for Tim Onopey, has filed a motion opposing the Office of the Attorney General's request to dismiss the case against his client without prejudice. He, instead, wants the court to dismiss the lawsuit with prejudice.

Dismissal "without prejudice" means the government can refile the charges against Onopey whenever they choose to while "with prejudice" means the charges cannot be filed again.

Torres argues that the government should not have the luxury of holding the "sword of Damocles" over a defendant by dismissing a case "when it knows, based on the evidence it possesses, that the facts compel against continued prosecution is in favor of dismissal with prejudice."

"The government has not provided factual basis to support the notion that dismissal without prejudice is in the interest of justice. It would be manifestly unjust to dismiss the case without prejudice for the government to be able to re-charge Mr. Onopey at a time of its choosing, when… Mr. Onopey was and is prepared to assert his right to a speedy trial and jury trial," Torres said.

Superior Court Associate Judge Joseph N. Camacho will hear the matter for Dec. 15 at 10am.

According to *Saipan Tribune* archives, Onopey, 25, and co-defendant Frankie Rettanlug, 27, were accused of raping a 17-year-old girl in the beach near Guma Sakman in Susupe.

Recently, the Camacho sentenced Rettanlug to eight years in prison after he pleaded guilty to sexual assault in the first degree.

Court documents state that prior to the rape, Onopey gave the minor a beer before repeatedly asking her to swim with him. The victim said she accepted the beer and eventually agreed to go swimming. She told police that she and Onopey swam to the buoy and that's when Onopey allegedly sexually assaulted her.

The 17-year-old told police she tried to move away from Onopey but every time she did so, he would pull her back. The victim said she repeatedly asked Onopey to stop, to no avail.

After the alleged sexual assault, the victim said they swam to shore but she was afraid to get help because Onopey was still in the area.

While on the shore, the minor said she was feeling dizzy and felt like she was going to faint, so she laid down to rest and eventually fell asleep.

When she woke up, she said Rettanlug approached her and

See DEFENSE on Next Page

Free webinars on federal contracting

The Guam Procurement Technical Assistance Center is offering free webinars this month.

Webinars are held every Wednesday from 10am to 11:30am via Zoom. Zoom links are emailed to all registered attendees 30 minutes before the webinar.

■ **Dec. 14, 2022–Federal Contract Opportunities**– *SAM.gov is the portal for federal contract opportunities. The Guam PTAC will show you how to use the website to ensure you do not miss any opportunities. Opportunity types, search filters, and search strategies will be discussed.*

■ **Dec. 21, 2022–Cybersecurity: Federal Contractor Responsibilities**–*Department of Defense vendors need to protect Covered Unclassified Information. We will discuss DOD's current requirements as well as the upcoming Cybersecurity Maturity Model Certification.*

■ **Dec.28, 2022–Government of Guam Procurement**–*The Guam PTAC will explain Government of Guam pocurement laws and regulations, where to find opportunities, and how to submit bids.*

To register, visit: https://www.guamptac.com/news-and-events.php ***(PTAC)***

NORTHERN MARIANAS HOUSING CORPORATION
P.O. BOX 500514, Saipan, MP 96950-0514

INVITATION FOR BIDS (IFB)
(THIS IS AD IS PAID FOR NMHC WITH HUD FUNDS)

NMHC IFB 2023-002

BID SUBMISSION DATE & TIME: January 13, 2023, 2:00 p.m.

Vehicle Lease of 3-Pick-up Trucks for the Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) Program

Bid information and packet is available on December 13, 2022, at the NMHC website at www.nmhcgov.net by clicking on the "Procurement Tab" or at the CDBG-DR website at www.cnmi-cdbgdr.com.

The provisions of the NMHC Procurement regulations, NMIAC 100-60-725 AND 100-60-730 Prohibiting Gratuities, Kickbacks and Contingent Fees shall apply.

Inquiries regarding this bid shall be submitted to Mr. Jacob Muna, Office Manager/Procurement Officer via email at officemanager@nmhcgov.net or facsimile at (670)234-9021, on or before December 23, 2022, no later than 10 a.m.

/s/
Jesse S. Palacios
Corporate Director

/s/
Merced "Marcie" M. Tomokane
Chairwoman
NMHC Board of Directors

NORTHERN MARIANAS HOUSING CORPORATION
P.O. BOX 500514, Saipan, MP 96950-0514

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS (RFP)
(THIS IS AD IS PAID FOR NMHC WITH HUD FUNDS)

NMHC RFP 2023-001

BID SUBMISSION DATE & TIME: January 13, 2023, 10:00 a.m.

Architect-Engineer Services for the Construction of New Classroom Buildings for the Northern Marianas College (NMC)

The Request for Proposals and Scope of Work are available on December 13, 2022, at the NMHC website at www.nmhcgov.net and at www.cnmi-cdbgdr.com by clicking on the "Procurement Tab".

Inquiries regarding this RFP must be submitted in writing or email to Mr. Jacob Muna, Office Manager/Procurement Officer at officemanager@nmhcgov.net or submitted by facsimile to (670)234-9021 no later than 9:00 a.m. local time on December 28, 2022.

This procurement is in accordance with the NMHC Procurement Regulations. Proposal procedures shall be in full compliance with NMIAC §§ 100-60-210 (Competitive Sealed Proposal) and 100-60-305 (Architect-Engineer Services) of the NMHC Procurement Regulations. The provisions of the NMHC Procurement regulations, NMIAC 100-60-725 AND 100-60-730 Prohibiting Gratuities, Kickbacks and Contingent Fees shall apply.

Mandatory Pre-proposal Conference will be held at the NMHC Central Office Conference Room, Garapan, Saipan, on December 28, 2022, 10 a.m. local time. Failure to attend the Mandatory Pre-proposal conference will be considered a non-responsive offeror.

For more information, contact Mr. Jacob Muna, Office Manager/Procurement Officer, at (670)234- 6866/9447 or email at officemanager@nmhcgov.net during regular business hours, 7:30 a.m. - 4:30 p.m. Monday through Friday, except CNMI holidays.

/s/
Jesse S. Palacios
Corporate Director

/s/
Merced "Marcie" M. Tomokane
Chairwoman
NMHC Board of Directors

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
HEALTH CARE PROFESSIONS LICENSING BOARD
P.O. Box 502078, Bldg., 1242 Pohnpei Court
Capitol Hill, Saipan, MP 96950
Tel No: (670) 664-4809 Fax: (670) 664-4814
Email: cnmi@cnmibpl-hcplb.net
Website: cnmibpl-hcplb.net

Pursuant to P.L. 8-41, Section 11, Governor Ralph DLG. Torres and Lt. Governor Arnold I. Palacios, through the Health Care Professions Licensing Board (HCPLB) are hereby giving notice that it will hold its regular monthly board meeting on ***Wednesday, December 14, 2022, at 8 a.m.*** on Saipan. The meeting will be held at the Administration Building, Governor's Conference Room on Capitol Hill.

AGENDA

I. Meeting Call to Order
II. Determination of Quorum
III. Review and Adoption of Agenda
IV. Review and Adoption of Minutes (10/26/2022)
V. Public Comments
VI. Chairperson's Report
- Re-nomination and Confirmation Hearing for Dr. Angelica Sabino
- Compliance with the full licensure requirements
- Issues on Healthcare Providers Practicing without a License

VII. Director's Report
- 2022 Citizen Centric Report
- Financial Report
- Notification on the Proposed Amendments for Psychology & Physicians
- Update on the Energov Program

VIII. Investigator's Report
IX. Communications from the Governor's Office & Legislature
A. Governor's Office
- Re-nomination Letter for Dr. Angelica Sabino

B. Legislature
- Confirmation Hearing for Dr. Angelica Sabino

X. Old Business
XI. New Business
- Proposed Dental Therapist Practice Agreement

XII. Pending Applications for Board's Review
A. New Application
B. Renewal Application
XIII. Miscellaneous Business
XIV. Executive Session: The Board may vote to meet in executive session to consult with Counsel on pending or anticipated legal matters.
XV. Announcements
A. Next Meeting Date
B. Adjournment of Meeting

IN THE SUPERIOR COURT FOR THE COMMONWEALTH OF THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS

In the Matter of the Petition to Appoint General Guardianship for: REYNALYN MARIE LEISARAFISCH FITIAL, a minor child, By: QUAYLA JEAN F. TAITANO and JERRY JOSEPH SAMMY, Petitioner(s).	FCD GU CIVIL ACTION NO. 22-0173 ORDER AFTER HEARING

This matter came before the Court for a Guardianship Hearing on October 24, 2022 at 9:00 a.m., in Courtroom 217A, at the Superior Court Guma' Hustisia, Susupe, Saipan, Commonwealth of the Northern Marianas. Petitioner Quayla Jean F. Taitano appeared pro se. Petitioner Jerry Joseph Sammy did not appear.

Based on the matters adduced, the Court found that Petitioners did not publish and post as prescribed by order of the Court. The Court continued this matter to allow Petitioners to meet posting and publication requirements.

This matter is continued to **December 19, 2022 at 9:00 a.m. in Courtroom 217A**. Both Petitioners ordered to appear.

SO ORDERED on the date set forth above in the year 2022.

/s/
TERESA KIM-TENORIO, Associate Judge

Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands
OFFICE OF THE GOVERNOR
Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality
Division of Coastal Resources Management
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Tel: (670) 664-8300; Fax: (670) 664-8315
www.dcrm.gov.mp

Eli D. Cabrera
Administrator

Richard V.Salas
Director, DCRM

MEETING OF THE CRM AGENCY OFFICIALS

Pursuant to Public Law 8-41, Section 11, Governor Ralph DLG. Torres and Lt. Governor Arnold I. Palacios through the Division of Coastal Resources Management (DCRM) hereby give notice that a CRM Agency Officials meeting will be held on ***Thursday, December 15, 2022 at 10:00AM*** at the DCRM Learning Center, Suite 301, Gualo Rai Center II, on Chalan Pale Arnold Road in Lower Gualo Rai, Saipan.

To minimize the threat of COVID-19 and to ensure the health and safety of all, virtual public participation will continue and encouraged via video conferencing through Zoom link: hhtps://zoom.us/j (Meeting ID: 6706648315) or join via telephone by calling the DCRM office at (670) 664-8300 for connection assistance and most updated information as Zoom meeting access code may change.

AGENDA

I. PRELIMINARY MATTERS
A. Call to Order
B. Roll Call
C. Adoption of Agenda
D. Adoption of October 27, 2022 Meeting Minutes
II. PUBLIC COMMENTS
III. PERMIT APPLICATION REVIEW
1) CRM Permit Application No. CRM-MS2022-0001 (formerly SMS-2022-062)
Project: PHASES III and IV OF RT.33 BEACH ROAD IMPROVEMENT PROJECT
Applicant: DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS
The Department of Public Works (DPW) is proposing to commence the Phase III and Phase IV of Route 33 Beach Road Improvement Project. Phase III road construction will begin at the Route 33/Route 31 Intersection in Oleai-Chalan laolao and end at the Angaha Street and the Phase IV construction will commence at Angaha Street and end at Micro Beach Road and American Memorial Park (AMP) Intersection (Route 33/Route 38 Intersection) in North Garapan, Saipan
a. Agencies' Discussion
b. Agencies' Final Determination
IV. OTHER MATTERS
1) Final adoption of proposed amendments to NMIAC Chapter 15-10 to revise DCRM's Permitting Fees
2) Authorization for DCRM Director to promulgate final regulation
V. ADJOURNMENT

All interested persons are welcome to attend and submit written or oral testimony regarding the above agenda items. (Note: Pursuant to Public Law 8-41, Section 13(a) and Section 13(c), the Board may vote to meet in executive session).

/s/ RICHARD V. SALAS
Director, DCRM

USCIS updates policy to automatically extend green cards

Effective Dec. 12, 2022, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services is updating the USCIS Policy Manual to allow USCIS to automatically extend the validity of Permanent Resident Cards—commonly called green cards—for lawful permanent residents who have applied for naturalization.

This update is expected to help naturalization applicants who experience longer processing times, because they will receive an extension of lawful permanent resident status and may not need to file Form I-90, Application to Replace Permanent Resident Card (green card).

LPRs who properly file Form N-400, Application for Naturalization, may receive this extension without regard to whether they filed Form I-90. USCIS will update the language on Form N-400 receipt notices to extend green cards for up to 24 months for these applicants. The receipt notice can be presented with the expired green card as evidence of continued status as well as identity and employment authorization under List A of Employment Eligibility Verification (Form I-9), if presented before the expiration of the 24-month extension period provided in the notice.

Prior to this change, under USCIS policy, naturalization applicants who did not apply for naturalization at least six months before their green card expiration date needed to file Form I-90, Application to Replace Permanent Resident Card (green card), to maintain proper documentation of their lawful status. Applicants who applied for naturalization at least six months prior to their green card expiration were eligible to receive an Alien Documentation, Identification, and Telecommunications stamp in their passport, which served as temporary evidence of their LPR status. This policy was based on the processing goal of 180 days or six months for Form N-400s, which would make filing Form I-90 unnecessary for applicants who filed at least six months before their green card expiration date.

This policy update recognizes USCIS' current processing times, while improving flexibility and efficiency by reducing the number of ADIT stamp appointments in field offices and the number of Form I-90s filed, which allows for these resources to be focused on other immigration benefit adjudications.

The extension will apply to all applicants who file Form N-400 on or after Dec. 12, 2022. LPRs who filed for naturalization prior to Dec. 12 will not receive a Form N-400 receipt notice with the extension. If their green card expires, they generally must still file Form I-90 or receive an ADIT stamp in their passport, in order to maintain valid evidence of their lawful permanent resident status. Lawful permanent residents who lose their green card generally must still file Form I-90, even if they have applied for naturalization and received the automatic extension under this updated policy. This is because noncitizens must carry within their personal possession proof of registration, such as the green card and any evidence of extensions or may be subject to criminal prosecution under INA 264(e). Applicants who require an ADIT stamp may request an appointment at a USCIS Field Office by contacting the USCIS Contact Center. ***(USCIS)***

AD

From Page 1

and Rep. Christina E. Sablan (D-Saipan) at the Infrastructure Recovery Program and at the Office of Planning and Development.

Former representative Juan I. "Liling" Reyes, who is the overall chairman of the Palacios-Apatang transition and inauguration committees, released the list to the media during a press conference at their headquarters in Susupe yesterday morning.

Reyes said the committees will lead the process of ensuring a smooth, timely, and orderly transition of governmental power on Jan. 9, 2023.

Named as members of Propst's DPS team are Sablan, Joe Aldan Jr., Johnny Tomei, Mike Landon, Tom Blas Jr., Vincent Limes, Paul Murphy, Melissa Jack, and Juan Wabol Jr.

Members of Sablan's team at the IRP are Sam McPhetres, Katrina Punzalan, Sonya Dancoe, and Efrain Camacho.

Members of Sablan's OPD team are George Sablan, Katrina Punzalan, Sonya Dancoe, and Efrain Camacho.

Rep. Leila F. Staffler (D-Saipan), who was Rep. Christina Sablan's running mate in the gubernatorial election, is leading the transition process at the Department of Labor and at the Northern Marianas Technical Institute.

Staffler team members at Labor are Sen. Edith DeLeon Guerrero (D-Saipan), Candy Feliciano, James Cabrera, Kimberly Acebo, and Dr. Bobbie Cruz.

Staffler's team members at NMTI are DeLeon Guerrero, Rose Igitol, Joanna Aquino, and Candy Feliciano.

Representative-elect Vince Kobre Aldan will oversee the transition at the Commonwealth Utilities Corp. The members are Rep. Christina Sablan, Albert Taitano, Patrick Guerrero, Mariano Iglecias, Allan Palacios, Travis Jones, Adrian Reyes, Lilian Limes, and former lieutenant governor Tim Villagomez.

Former attorney general Joey Patrick San Nicolas will oversee the transition at the Office of the Governor's legal counsel. Michael Evangelista is the only member of San Nicolas' team.

Evangelista will oversee the transition at the Saipan Zoning Office. The members are Daisy M. Propst, Benusto Lisua, and Eleanor Alinas.

Representative-elect Marissa Flores (Ind-Saipan) will lead the transition team at the Victims of Crime Act and Disabilities Council. Her members are Cleo Nenning and Jodie Cabrera.

A longer version of this story is available at www. saipantribune.com

RUNOFF

From Page 1

» Pedro P. Tenorio Multi-Purpose Center area is likely the site of Palacios-Apatang inauguration

» $200,000 - $240,000 estimated budget for inauguration activities

transition committees' headquarters in Susupe, former House of Representatives speaker Oscar M. Babauta, who is vice chairman of the Inauguration Subcommittee, disclosed that they are looking the front of the Pedro P. Tenorio Multi-Purpose Center in Susupe as the inauguration site on Jan. 9, 2023, and that the estimated budget for the inauguration activities is from $200,000 to $240,000.

Former representative Claudio K. Norita, who is vice chairman of the Transition Subcommittee, stated at the press briefing that his transition team's job is to give a picture of the departments' conditions prior to the inauguration of governor-elect Arnold I. Palacios and lieutenant-governor-elect David M. Apatang.

"The transition's job is not to look for candidate or possible candidates for Cabinet [members]," Norita said.

Reyes said they are hoping that the CEC board will certify the runoff election results this week because the transition committees cannot move because of the legal aspect of the transition.

Reyes said they, however, have been doing the legwork required to move as soon as the CEC certification is completed.

The CEC board has yet to certify the runoff election results due to some challenged absentee votes. CEC executive director Kayla S. Igitol said yesterday that the CEC board will meet this Thursday.

With the limited time between now and Inauguration Day, Reyes said, there's going to be a lot of hard work ahead of them. He is optimistic, though, that with all the professional people that are helping them, the timeline will be met.

Norita said the delay in the certification of election results is creating a time constraint. "We have to work this morning, we're meeting those [on] the list to start to adjust to the timeline," Norita said.

Originally, under the timeline for the team that is overseeing the transition at the department levels, the draft report must be in Dec. 16 and the final report must be in by Dec. 20 so that Palacios and Apatang can have a snapshot of what they're expecting in their administration from each department.

Norita said for the persons that are leading the teams, they gave them a lot of discretion in going out and recruiting people for the teams to help them facilitate and accelerate the transition.

A longer version of this story is available at www. saipantribune.com

NMI

From Page 1

Over the weekend, the month-old mugshots of wanted fugitives Ye Fang, better known as Batu, and Yu Qui Min went viral in the CNMI community, along with videos of firearms and other graphic, violent videos. According to the captions of these posts, Batu, who remains at large, was allegedly threatening the community with a shoot-out.

However, after investigating the viral posts over the weekend, DPS spokesperson Adrian Pangelinan said in a press briefing that these videos were not directed at the CNMI community and that they were shot over two years ago.

"We want to clear up that our officers have been looking into these videos since they surfaced, specifically the videos showcasing heavy weaponry, and the video of the wanted fugitive [Batu] choking another unknown individual. We found that these videos are not recent and there is no threat to the community," he said.

According to Pangelinan, the video was taken by a Chinese female two years ago. DPS has chosen to withhold the name of the woman to protect her privacy. DPS was able to speak with the woman via translator and she assured officers that the video was not meant to threaten the community; instead, it was a threat to Batu who she claims had threatened her and her family.

In addition, DPS said that, upon further investigation, the guns shown on the videos have all been accounted for and are legally registered with DPS.

"For the first video, we want to clear up that it was taken about two years ago. The female individual in that video was identified and we have spoken to her and we do know who she is. The weapons in that video have been accounted for, they are currently registered in the CNMI. The owner of those weapons is the husband, a local male. The female individual took that video two years ago and was not making a public threat, nor was the threat directed at any law enforcement. The video was just showcasing the weapons that she has and will use if needed to protect her and her husband because they allegedly received a threat from Batu," he said.

"For the second video, the one of fugitive Batu choking an unknown individual, [that video] was taken five years ago," Pangelinan added.

A longer version of this story is available at www. saipantribune.com

TRIP

From Page 1

president, disclosed that the Japan TRIP program has been slow. To give a picture of how slow the market's recovery has been, he explained that compared to 2019, Japanese tourism in the Marianas is down 80%. He could not give an exact number at the time.

"At this moment, Japan's outbound tourism is very slow, recovery is very slow. Industry partners and professionals are saying that by the end of this year, Japan tourism is probably is going to be, compared to 2019, down 80%. So, that's where we are at this moment," he said.

For the first two months of the Japan TRIP program, only a limited number of seats were filled—about 30% load factor, Ichikura said.

"So, the first a couple of months, September and October, we had a very limited number of Japanese customers flying here. It was a daunting process, but we have started to understand what works for the Japan market," he said.

Ichikura explained that the slow start can be attributed to different factors, mainly the lingering fears to travel, and the low vaccination rate among children.

"There are several market conditions that we are facing with our Japan customers. First of all is the apprehension to travel, even though [the] vaccination rate is high amongst the general consumers, especially active seniors—over 90%. But keep in mind, the Marianas used to be a family market. Unfortunately, families with small children between the ages 5 and 11, vaccination is very limited. So parents are afraid to bring their kids here," he said.

Ichikura also noted that due to inflation, the Japanese yen is about 30% weaker now in the U.S. compared to previous years, causing Japanese tourists to find other destinations to travel to.

"Another challenge is the pricing, the exchange rate in comparison to three years ago. The Japanese yen is weak [by] approximately 30%," he said.

Despite these challenges, Ichikura said the MVA office in Japan continues to work with travel partners to further market the CNMI destination and provides promotion to entice Japanese travelers to come to Saipan.

"The MVA TRIP Japan committee has started to provide a thank you promotion where we offer a discount on group packages. This has been helping to pick up numbers in November, December. So not as fast as Korea recovery, but we are gradually picking up. We are hopeful by the end of this month, we will fill at least 60% load factor," he said.

DEFENSE

From Page 3

asked what happened to her and Onopey and then invited her to go closer to the shoreline.

When she refused, the victim said Rettanlug dragged her to the beach where Rettanlug sexually assaulted her. The victim said she managed to get away from him but he grabbed her legs and dragged her back so she kicked water in his face, which caused him to stop.

When she got away, she said she went to where there were people she could talk to about the incident.

Happy Holidays

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Thank You,
David Hood
& TEAM

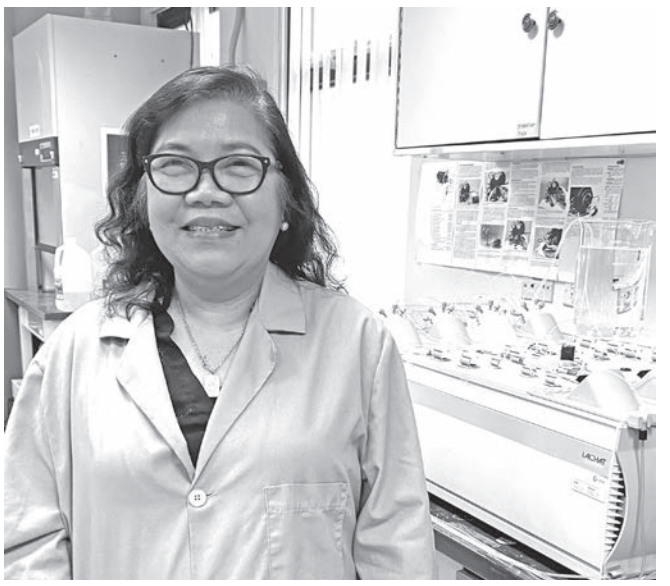
EPA certifies two BECQ lab officers in Microbiology

The CNMI Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality announced Monday that environmental surveillance laboratory manager Charito Bautista and laboratory specialist Cassandra Mangarero have been certified by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency after completing and passing the Microbiology Laboratory Certification Officer training course on Sept. 19-23, 2022, at the EPA Office of Ground Water and Drinking Water in Cincinnati, Ohio.

Bautista is now an EPA-certified laboratory officer in Chemistry (Inorganic) and Microbiology, while Mangarero is now an EPA-certified laboratory officer in Microbiology.

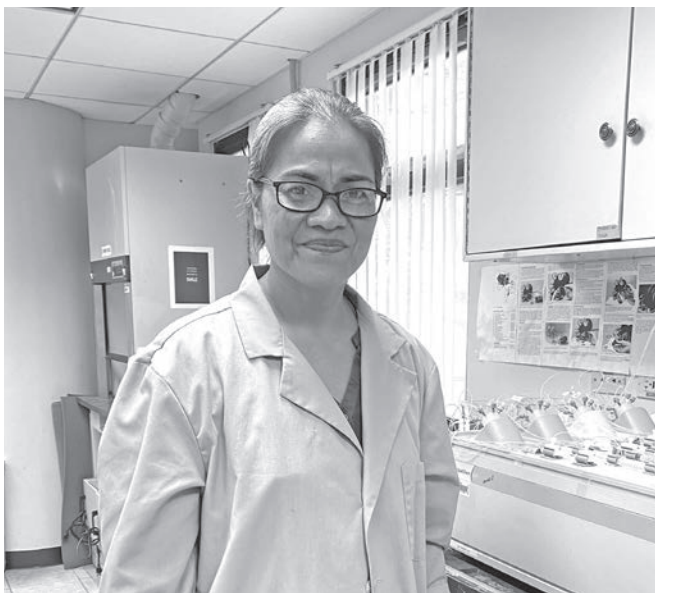
The EPA is the drinking water quality regulator of the federal government and is responsible for enforcing drinking water regulations for public water supplies. The agency's main priorities include keeping water free of harmful bacteria, minimizing harmful disinfection byproducts, eliminating lead from pipework, preventing pesticides from entering our waters, managing risks to water supplies, and ensuring all water treatment plants are effective.

The EPA holds Drinking Water Laboratory Certification Officer training courses for Chemistry and Microbiology at the Andrew W. Breidenbach Environmental Research Center in Cincinnati, Ohio. The courses include a mock laboratory evaluation and a final examination. These courses are designed to teach the critical elements of evaluating a drinking water laboratory performing compliance sample analyses and will follow the criteria outlined in the Manual for the Certification of Laboratories Analyzing Drinking Water.



BECQ

CNMI Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality environmental surveillance laboratory manager Charito Bautista.



BECQ

CNMI Bureau of Environmental and Coastal Quality environmental surveillance laboratory specialist Cassandra Mangarero.

BECQ administrator Eli D. Cabrera said the goal of the BECQ Environmental Surveillance Laboratory is to have all laboratory staff be certified for both Chemistry and Microbiology.

"As an island community, protecting and improving the CNMI's drinking water is a top priority for us here at BECQ. A critical component of this work includes the certification of our laboratory staff by the EPA. We look forward to increasing our capacity at our Division of Environmental Quality so we can continue safeguarding our community and protecting our environment," he said.

For more information about the BECQ Environmental Surveillance Laboratory, call (670) 664-8520. ***(BECQ)***

Port security and resiliency assessments in Guam, CNMI

The Port Security and Resiliency Assessment team stand for a photo with members of the Port Authority of Guam and Port Police at Agana Boat Basin on Dec. 7, 2022, during comprehensive assessments of the commercial ports and other critical maritime infrastructure to provide insight into potential vulnerabilities and recommendations to mitigate any threats. The team consists of experts and technical specialists from the U.S. Coast Guard and the Army National Guard's Critical Infrastructure Protection Battalion who apply their operations and emergency response backgrounds to these assessments.

U.S. COAST GUARD/CHIEF WARRANT OFFICER SARA MUIR

By SARA MUIR
U.S. COAST GUARD FORCES MICRONESIA/ SECTOR GUAM

SANTA RITA, Guam—The Port Security and Resiliency Assessment team is in Guam the week of Dec. 5, 2022, and will soon travel to Saipan to conduct comprehensive assessments of the commercial ports and other critical maritime infrastructure to provide insight into potential vulnerabilities and recommendations to mitigate any threats.

Capt. Nick Simmons, the Captain of the Port for Guam and the CNMI and commander of U.S. Coast Guard Forces Micronesia/Sector Guam, met with and welcomed the PSRA team Tuesday.

"There is no shortage of interest in building our regional resilience and capability out here, but it is a partnership, and we are committed to working closely with the Port Authority of Guam and our Department of Defense colleagues to do it right," said Simmons. "We are excited to have the PSRA team here in Guam. The report they produce is designed to complement our Area Maritime Security Assessment and aids our federal maritime security coordinators. It is another tool we and our partners can use to be objective about port investments and support additional grants."

The team consists of experts and technical specialists from the U.S. Coast Guard and the Army National Guard's Critical Infrastructure Protection Battalion who apply their operations and emergency response backgrounds to these assessments. Their goal is to provide feedback on improving resiliency and mitigating threats from possible terrorism or natural disasters. This in-depth approach may not be regularly available to local port areas. In the past year, this team has been in Alaska and other parts of the contiguous United States.

"This is a no-fault non-regulatory assessment which provides an opportunity not only to strengthen positive relations with port stakeholders, but also provide space for recommendations to enhance their security posture and support for improvements to existing infrastructure," said Lt. Michael Bosch, team lead for CG-PSA-2.

Each assessment has four phases: (1) advance research and scoping, (2) pre-assessment, (3) assessment, and (4) post-assessment phase. The pre-and post-assessment phases are conducted at the home office in Washington, D.C. During the assessment, the team speaks with the on-site port and marina managers, does a walkaround, reviews procedures and physical security, and applies technology. This technology includes 3D imaging and drones to create a virtual tour, also called a panoramic tour, which is a wide-ranging view or video simulation of an existing place that is useful to many port users and managers.

In Guam, the team did a port ride along with U.S. Coast Guard Station Apra Harbor, met with port and Navy personnel, and assessed the commercial port, as well as Navy Base Guam, Agana Boat Basin also known as the Gregorio D. Perez Marina, and Agat Marina. They will soon go to the CNMI and assess the Tanapag Harbor.

PSRAs can be used for several reasons, including to support an area maritime security assessment, typically through the assessment of five sites and one waterway based on top scenarios within the sector, scaled to focus on specific concerns within the port area, a national special security event, or video capture of a waterway to support training or maritime domain awareness needs. These assessments can also be used to support grant applications for port and waterway improvements.

As announced in October, the Jose D. Leon Guerrero Commercial Port, also known as the Port of Guam, is among several Western Pacific entities receiving federal grant money through the 2022 Port Security Grant Program to ensure supply chain resiliency within Guam and the Mariana Islands.

Guam and the CNMI will receive close to $2.1 million from the PSGP, with the Port Authority awarded just over $564,000, Guam Customs and Quarantine awarded more than $526,000, and the CNMI's Commonwealth Port Authority receiving about $88,000. The PSGP is one of four grant programs under the Department of Homeland Security's Federal Emergency Management Agency that focuses on strengthening the nation's critical transportation security infrastructure.

The purpose of the PSGP is to provide the necessary funds for not only state partners but local, territorial, and private sector partners to enhance security measures and resilience to critical maritime infrastructure and build threat readiness.

Sablan says they haven't reviewed BOOST documents yet as a joint committee

By FERDIE DE LA TORRE
ferdie_delatorre@saipantribune.com
REPORTER

Rep. Christina E. Sablan (D-Saipan) said Friday that members of the House of Representatives' Committee on Judiciary and Governmental Operations Committee and Committee on Ways and Means haven't met yet to review as a joint committee the contents of the documents that came in last week pursuant to their subpoena issued to several entities and persons regarding the Torres' administration's Building Optimism, Opportunity and Stability Together, or BOOST Program.

This was learned in response to Rep. Sheila J. Babauta (D-Saipan) asking at the Saipan and Northern Islands Legislative Delegation meeting what are some of the main issues that have been identified by the joint committees so far and other updates on the BOOST Program hearings or interviews.

Sablan, who was the one who moved to issue the subpoenas, said the things that were asked in the subpoenas were just some of the basics. "What criteria were being used? How many applicants were there? How much money was requested? What's their rubric? Who was on the review panel? How were decisions being made? Really some very basic elements of the program that weren't very transparent to the public," Sablan said.

She said it's a joint fact-finding effort by the two committees and that a number of subpoenas have been issued. She said they expect the hearings to begin for the witnesses that will be called to testify this Friday.

"The records are just coming in this week and the members of the committees are reviewing them. Dec. 16 is when we are looking at beginning the hearings," the lawmaker said.

Sablan said there are questions that are being drafted right now and she encourages lawmakers if they have any questions that they'd like the committees to include in the hearings to reach out to the committee chairs or members.

Funded by the American Rescue Plan act, BOOST is project of the Office of the Governor and the Department of Commerce that aims to provide financial assistance in the form of grants to CNMI businesses and non-profit organizations.

Finance Secretary David DLG. Atalig and William "Wil" Castro, who is the chief of staff of Gov. Ralph DLG Torres, were among several persons and entities that the committees served with subpoenas to compel them to produce documents and testify related to the administration of the BOOST Program.

Traditional celebration of Feast of Immaculate Conception resumes

The Diocese of Chalan Kanoa, in collaboration with Mount Carmel School, restored its traditional celebration of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception last Thursday, Dec. 8, 2022, which celebrates the belief that Mary the mother of Jesus was conceived and preserved without the effects of original sin.

The Immaculate Conception is a holy day of obligation in the Catholic community. As part of the traditional ceremony, the Diocese of Chalan Kanoa, Mount Carmel School students, and community members held a Mass that crowned the Blessed Mother, guided the procession along Beach Road, and held the candle tribute for the Blessed Mother Mary.

This restoration of the traditional ceremony was deemed more special as celebrations have been adapted for the last two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic. ***(MCS)***

PHOTOS BY MCS

Bishop Ryan P. Jimenez crowns the Blessed Virgin Mary during the celebration of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception on Thursday, Dec. 8, 2022, at the Mount Carmel Cathedral.

Community members chanted «Biba Santa Maria» during the restored traditional celebration of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

Participants at the Feast of the Immaculate Conception receive communion during the Mass celebration.

Mount Carmel School students present gifts to the Diocese during the offertory of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception

Cross-bearers, altar servers, and other diocesan members help lead the Procession of the Blessed Mother during the restored traditional celebration of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

Community members participate in the Eucharistic celebration of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

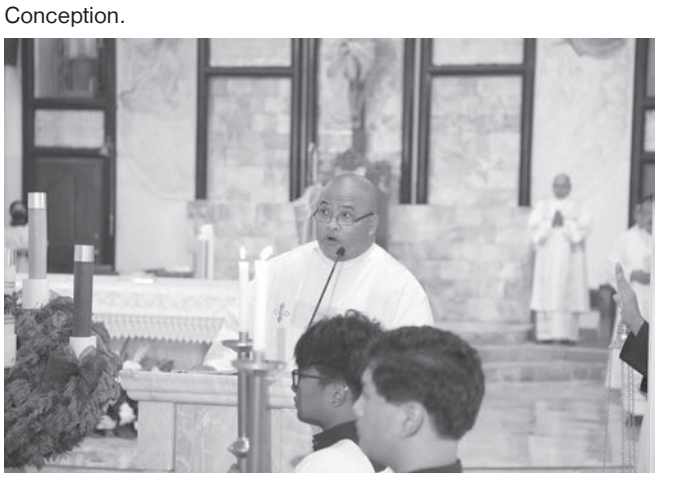
All churches of the Diocese of Chalan Kanoa were represented during the celebration of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception on Thursday, Dec. 8, 2022.

Community members and Mount Carmel School students packed the Mount Carmel Cathedral in celebration of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

Mount Carmel School student Brissa C. Hunter reads the Universal Prayer of the liturgy during the celebration of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

Mount Carmel School student Gerald Deleon Guerrero reads the second reading of the liturgy during the celebration of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.

Mount Carmel School student Brent Ortizo reads the first reading of the liturgy during the celebration of the Feast of the Immaculate Conception.



Deacon Antonio Yarobwemal of the Diocese of Chalan Kanoa reads the Proclamation of the Gospel during the Feast of the Immaculate Conception celebration.

Opinion

Hafa Adai!
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EDITORIAL

Feds continue kicking the can on REAL ID

More than 20 years after 9/11, Americans are still taking their shoes off at airport checkpoints and remain prohibited from packing larger bottles in their luggage. Yet the folks at the Department of Homeland Security continue to be flummoxed about how to implement more stringent identification requirements for airline passengers.

On Monday, the department announced that it was again delaying enforcement of the Real ID Act, which Congress passed 17 years ago. The legislation imposed certain standards on states for issuing driver's licenses and ID cards, forcing recipients to provide additional documentation. The purpose was to enhance travel security by improving the reliability of state-issued identification.

The latest extension means air travelers have been granted a two-year reprieve and won't need federally approved IDs until May 2025.

Department officials blame the most recent delay on the coronavirus, claiming that "Real ID progress over the past two years has been significantly hindered by state driver's licensing agencies having to work through the backlogs created by the pandemic." But this ignores the fact that missed deadlines have been a feature of the law from the outset. The act was initially supposed to be applied in 2008, and the latest delay is the seventh time enforcement has been pushed back.

The real problem is that many Americans still don't have the upgraded licenses. According to the DHS, only 43 percent of state-issued IDs as of 2021 met the law's requirements. Many people still don't realize that at some point they will be unable to board a flight without the Real ID or a passport. Imagine the chaos—and the effect on airlines and airports—if half of all travelers were turned away because they had only a traditional driver's license.

Those in the travel industry have warned of disruptions. In 2020, Kevin Burke, president and CEO of The Airports Council-North America, told NBC News that enforcement of the law is "a crisis waiting to happen." He added, "If the government doesn't make a definitive statement now that they're going to extend this, then we're going to have a real crisis on our hands."

Equally important, however, is the debate over whether the Real ID will actually have any significant impact on airline safety. Homeland Security officials have been unable to enforce the requirement for 17 years, yet the nation has avoided a repeat of 9/11. "There is precious little in way of evidence supporting the idea that this additional hurdle could prevent terrorism," notes Reason magazine's Emma Camp.

Attempting to minimize disruptions that will accompany enforcement of the new ID policy makes sense. But disruptions are inevitable. If Congress isn't willing to live with that after nearly two decades, perhaps it should reconsider imposing this mandate at all.

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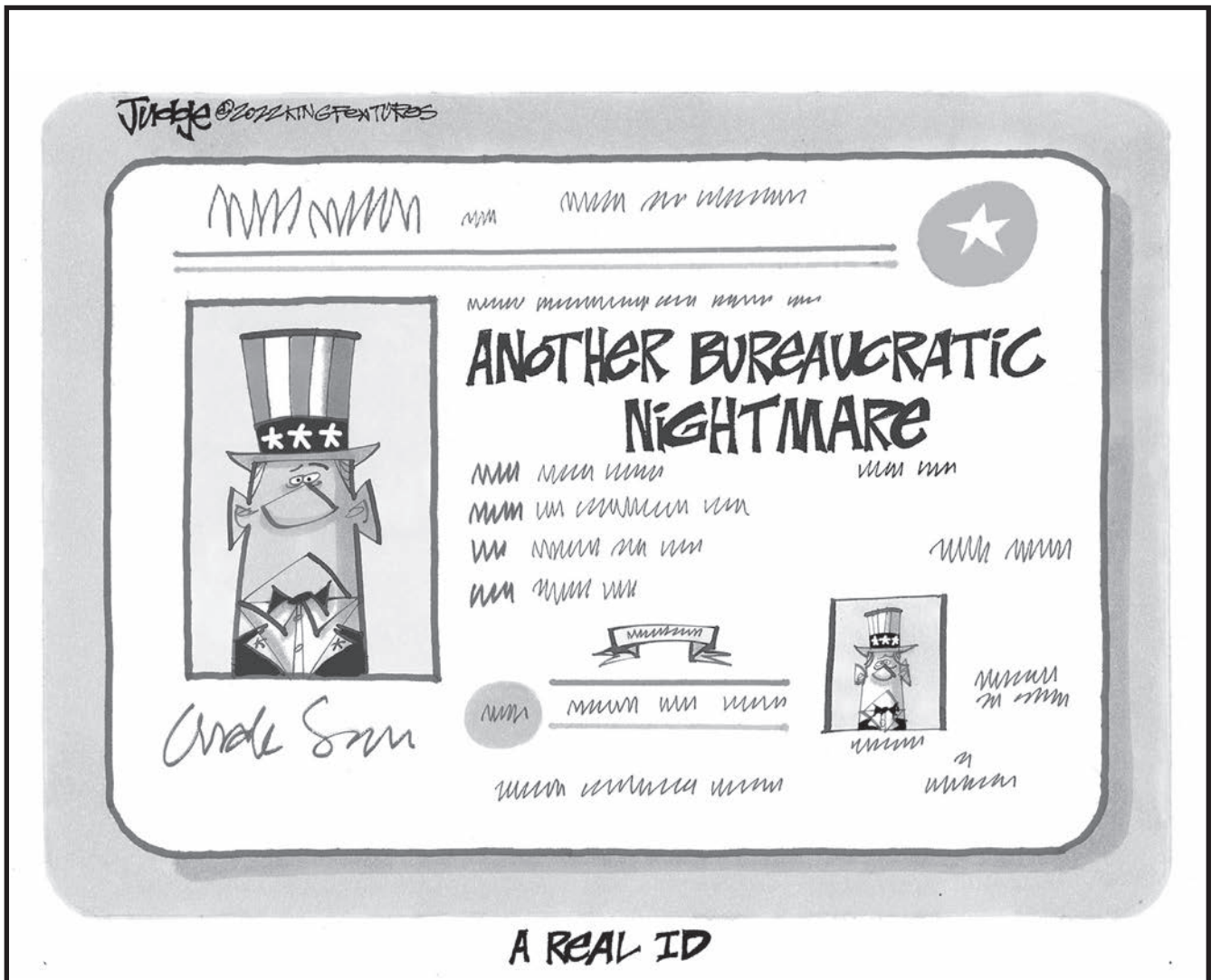

Becoming a father changes the brain. In a good way, actually

By JEFFERY M. LEVING
Chicago Tribune

Jeffery M. Leving is founder and president of the Law Offices of Jeffery M. Leving Ltd. Leving is an advocate for the rights of fathers and the author of Fathers' Rights, Divorce Wars *and* How to be a Good Divorced Dad.

For better and for worse, the link between biological parents and their children is well known, from a child inheriting a mother's wit and skill at math to inheriting a father's nose and short temper. It turns out children also cause a change in a father's brain, according to new evidence, improving their ability to empathize and process things visually.

Researchers from the University of Southern California found that women aren't the only ones who go through physical change when they become parents. Men's brains, according to a research study published in the journal Cerebral Cortex, undergo measurable changes after their children arrive.

Those changes involve slight brain shrinkage that contributes to neuroplasticity, which is the brain's ability to create and form new synaptic connections to adapt to new experiences. In layperson's terms, it affects areas in the brain linked to empathy and visual processing.

"Becoming a parent entails changes to your lifestyle and your biology," said Darby Saxbe, the study's senior author and a professor of psychology at USC's Dornsife College of Letters, Arts, and Sciences, in a statement. "And it requires new skills like being able to empathize with a nonverbal infant, so it makes sense but has not been proven that the brain would be particularly plastic during the transition to parenthood as well."

The study examined the brain scans of 40 expectant fathers—20 in the U.S. and 20 in Spain—and also looked at a control group of 17 childless men in Spain. Saxbe and her team found that the most significant changes in the expectant fathers occurred in the cortex, the brain's outer layer that manages attention, planning and executive functioning. By comparing scans made before and after the babies were born, changes where the brain processes visual information and areas that are part of the brain's default mode network were noticed. Conversely, the childless men showed no change.

The default mode network refers to regions of the brain that "light up" when the brain is at rest (not doing a particularly cognitive task), Saxbe told USC News.

"These regions are thought to be involved in mentalizing about other people's thoughts and feelings. The fact that we found changes in that part of the brain both for fathers suggests that there is some remodeling of the social brain taking place," Saxbe said.

Men also go through hormone changes when they become fathers, according to Lauren Cook-McKay, a licensed marriage and family therapist who was quoted in Healthline.

"The man's cortisol and testosterone levels generally dip within the first few weeks of being a father," she said. "This somehow makes fathers less aggressive, bringing them close to their children. New fathers also experience an increase in prolactin, oxytocin, and estradiol, which causes a man to exhibit nurturing behaviors."

Cook-McKay also said something that I've been writing about for some time, that being with your infant child is beneficial for both child and parents.

"Parental psychological adjustment determines parental involvement," Cook-McKay said. "Parents who have poor parental psychological adjustments tend to be less involved with their children. Engaging with an infant can help produce positive effects in terms of responsiveness and attentiveness."

Engaging with your infant child is vital for fathers because it establishes a strong relationship between father and child early on. I've written several times over the years about the numerous studies that have shown that children tend to do much better behaviorally and emotionally when both of their parents play a meaningful role in their lives.

The USC study shows that there's more research to be done on how the brain reacts to things such as fear, learning and reward when becoming a father, as well as effects from sleep deprivation and stress. While we have known the impact of fathers on their children, it is interesting to learn of the biological impact of children on their fathers.

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Those killings linked to a man 'catfishing' a teen girl? A reminder that kids are easy prey

By ROBIN ABCARIAN
Los Angeles Times

I'm raising a middle schooler who spends too much time on Snapchat, TikTok and YouTube, so I'm already on guard about the dangers that social media present to adolescents.

But the internet-driven mayhem unleashed on a family in Riverside the day after Thanksgiving has shaken me and every parent I know.

What authorities have said so far is that a 15-year-old girl was "catfished" online, hooked by a man posing as a 17-year-old boy. The man, 28-year-old Austin Lee Edwards, showed up at her home, and apparently killed her mother and grandparents, set the home on fire, then fled with the girl.

Hours later and miles away, Edwards, a Virginia law enforcement officer, killed himself.

Police said the girl was unhurt, at least physically. Can you imagine, though, her emotional wounds?

We don't have many more the details about the incident, only the tragic outlines and an emerging understanding that Edwards had a troubling past. What we do know is enough to make me want to confiscate my 12-year-old niece's iPad and lock her in a tower until she is 25.

Instead, what I have done is read news stories to her about the Riverside case, emphasizing that anyone can fall victim to this kind of deceit.

On Monday after school, I sat her in front of my computer, called up the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children website and played some short videos about catfishing and "sextortion." The videos graphically illustrate how an adolescent boy or girl can be tricked into sending inappropriate photos, then be blackmailed for money or more explicit images by a person pretending to be someone other than who they are. If the youngsters fail to comply, the catfisher threatens to release their images publicly. The perpetrators make contact by posting fake profiles, sending friend requests and claiming to have friends in common with the victims. It is very easy to see how kids could be duped.

"For the first time in history," says neuroscientist Andrew Doan in one of the videos, "we're letting strangers interact with our kids—in the back of our car, in their bedrooms, in their homes."

My niece was fascinated and surprised by the videos. I think—I pray—that she finally is beginning to understand that you cannot trust strangers on the internet.

Why is this so hard to grasp?

"Physiologically, they don't understand who is out there and what people are capable of," says Elizabeth Yusi, a federal prosecutor in Virginia, in one of the videos my niece watched. Yusi prosecuted the catfishing/sextortion case of a former Navy Top Gun pilot who ensnared at least nine girls between the ages of 12 and 17. The judge who sentenced the pilot to 600 months in prison said his actions were sadistic and equated them with torture.

Some months ago, my niece and a friend of hers were each at home, sitting on their beds, jointly playing a game on the Roblox site called "Adopt Me." My niece's friend had spent weeks gathering enough credits, or Robucks, to buy a Neon Owl icon. A stranger who entered the game asked to see the Neon Owl and promptly stole it.

Don't ask me to explain how it happened; all I know is that my niece's friend was inconsolable. Both were so upset they deleted Roblox, which was fine by me.

But here's the thing that made my heart sink. Afterward, as my niece was telling me what happened, I said, "But I've told you a kajillion times that you can't trust strangers on the internet, right?"

"Yes," she said through tears. "But I guess I needed to have something bad happen before I believed you."

As I read up on catfishing, I came across the names of some famous victims: former professional football player Manti Te'o and country music star Brad Paisley and his wife, actor Kimberly Williams-Paisley.

In 2012, Te'o, then a star Notre Dame player, was victimized by a young person in the throes of gender dysphoria who posed as a female Stanford University student. The "relationship" took place entirely online and in letters. Te'o was told that his "girlfriend" died of leukemia the same day his grandmother died. Reporters went crazy for the "heartbreaking and inspirational" story.

The ruse was discovered after Deadspin reporters got—and investigated—a tip that the girlfriend had never existed.

Around the same time, the Paisleys were catfished by a woman pretending to be the mother of a child terminally ill with brain cancer. The sick child had supposedly begged her mother to contact Williams-Paisley, then co-starring in the TV series "Nashville." The mom didn't ask the Paisleys for money. But Paisley sang "Amazing Grace" on the phone to the nonexistent child, which formed the basis for the "theft of services" charges that sent the hoaxer to jail.

I am spending a lot of time these days pondering how to balance my niece's privacy with the lengths to which I need to go to keep her safe. I have decided to be a hard-ass. Her iPad belongs to me, I remind her. I have the passwords to her accounts, and I look at them regularly to keep tabs on her online activities.

"Are you looking at my messages?" she asked recently, curiosity tinged with outrage.

"Yes, I am," I replied. "And I probably will until I feel confident that you understand that bad things can happen to kids who are too trusting online. You aren't there yet."

I don't mind playing the wicked witch at home. It's better than locking her up in a tower.

Mass long-COVID disability threatens the economy

By KATHRYN A. EDWARDS
BLOOMBERG OPINION

-from-home revolution or quiet quitting: The COVID-19 pandemic's biggest impact on the U.S. labor market will be as a mass disability event. It's a shock that the economy is not well prepared to handle.

An estimated 1 in 4 COVID patients experience symptoms lasting months. In principle, not all of them should have to leave the labor force. First, they should be able to call in sick. If work-impairing symptoms persist beyond a week or two, they should have the option of requesting reduced hours or claiming short-term disability benefits. Only in severe cases, lasting several months or more, should they have to transition to long-term disability insurance.

Unfortunately, that's not how things operate in practice. Almost a quarter of US private-sector workers can't take any paid sick days. More than half have no access to short-term disability insurance, and those that do must fight to get long-COVID claims approved. Affected workers have a right to request workplace accommodations such as part-time schedules, but employers have ample leeway to deny such requests as unreasonable.

Keeping one's job isn't guaranteed, either. Under at-will rules, employees can be fired for missing work, even if due to illness (rather than disability). Although federal law guarantees up to 12 weeks of job protection to people who are ill or caring for a newborn or seriously sick family member, it covers only those who have been on payroll for 12 months – which, as of 2018, was just 56% of workers.

All this adds up to a big potential hit to the nation's productive capacity. Estimates based on Census data suggest that long COVID is keeping the equivalent of as many as 4 million working-age adults away from work – roughly the number of disabled veterans in the US. There's no indication that the number of affected workers is decreasing as people recover: The share of employees officially out sick or working part-time due to illness, for example, keeps rising.

More COVID is coming, both short and long. The Centers for Disease Control estimates 300,000 new cases a week, and hospitalizations are again on the rise. People will keep getting sick for reasons beyond their control. And given the policies the U.S. lacks—including universal access to paid sick days, short-term disability, job protection and part-time accommodation—many will lose earnings and jobs, or end up out of the labor force completely. Given the challenges the economy already faces, that's a loss the country can ill afford.

Kathryn Anne Edwards is an economist at the Rand Corp. and a professor at the Pardee Rand Graduate School.

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Rebuilding trust and passing the test

Life is a test and the challenge facing our governors-elect is no different—a test to live up to the promises made to the people. For me, they are off to a great start as the people on their "transition team" includes Democrats. The AD Team is living up to their word and that is all anyone can ask of anyone, which also implies they are determined to pass the test of rebuilding trust.

But some of the GOP who joined the AD team are already pushing to declare as GOP again, which would be a horrific and ugly poli-trick to play on Democrats and independent voters who want to see "neutral" leaders. I am just so glad that our governors-elect refused these horrific appeals. The last thing that we need is politics being injected into an effort to unite and rebuild trust. The time for divisive politics should be over—at least in the next four years.

I know some will say, Ambrose is writing about this because he is on the transition team, but that fact in itself is proof that our governors-elect are being true to the game, as we say in my culture. But there are also other Democrats on the transition team who are truly qualified to do the job so don't try to make this about Ambrose. The reality is we are seeing full inclusion (bipartisan) politics in the Executive Office, the House of Representatives, and the Senate which is a first for the CNMI since I arrived here in 1989.

Given the opening round of political appointments to the transition team, the AD Team is off to a great start in passing the monumental test of rebuilding trust, rebuilding our economy, and improving the quality of life for the people. For sure these people were chosen based on their qualifications and not just because of their politics because I talked about/against Arnold more than anyone. But Arnold didn't seek vengeance. Instead he forgave me viewing it as just politics, like a real professional and not forgetting that my wife and I worked our butts off for Heinz and Arnold. It's about looking forward and to the future and not in the rearview mirror. It takes special politicians to drop the politics and do the right thing—AD are proving to be special and leading by example to pass the test.

Only time will tell the final story about the governors-elect passing the test but for sure they are giving it their best shot and that is all we can ask of anyone. I'm just glad that I can finally stop yelling and screaming from the sidelines, trying to hold the governor and voters accountable. I was burned out and sick and tired of the ugly, stinking poli-tricking, gaslighting and outright lies. The NMDs who've gotten nothing, the retirees who were used like a political football and the people who have been divided and manipulated now have genuine hope for better days with better leaders.

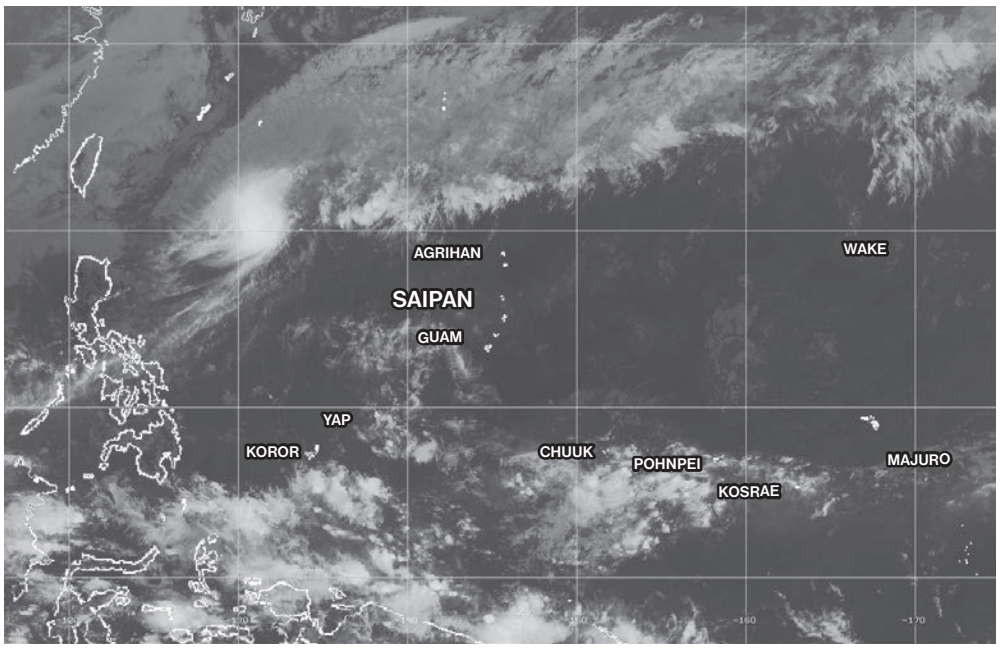
Ambrose M. Bennett
Kagman III, Saipan

The Weather

5-DAY FORECAST FOR SAIPAN AND TINIAN

TODAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY
Mostly sunny	Mostly sunny	Mostly sunny	Isolated showers. Mostly sunny	Isolated showers. Partly sunny
87º / 77º	87º / 77º	87º / 77º	87º / 77º	86º / 77º

YESTERDAY'S SATELLITE IMAGE



PICTURE TIME: 7:50 AM, MONDAY, DECEMBER 12, 2022

Western North Pacific between equator and 25N from 130E to 180.

The trough that passed south of Guam out performed expectations. This trough is now located west of the Marianas and will no longer impact the region. Buoys still show the long period swell with a max period of 15 seconds.

Satellite image and accompanying information are provided by the National Weather Service. For an updated weather forecast, visit the National Weather Service Guam homepage: www.prh.noaa.gov/guam/

MICRONESIA		▲ ▼ °F
Guam and Rota	Partly Cloudy	86° / 79°
Palau	Thunderstorms	86° / 79°
Yap	Mostly Cloudy	85° / 80°
Chuuk	Thunderstorms	86° / 80°
Pohnpei	Thunderstorms	85° / 77°
Kosrae	Scattered Thunderstorms	85° / 77°
Majuro	Thunderstorms	87° / 81°

DAY	SUNRISE	SUNSET
Today	6:33 AM	5:48 PM
Wednesday	6:34 AM	5:48 PM
Thursday	6:34 AM	5:48 PM
Friday	6:35 AM	5:49 PM
Saturday	6:35 AM	5:49 PM

DAY	MOONRISE	MOONSET	MOONRISE
Today	-	10:14 AM	9:34 PM
Wednesday	-	11:03 AM	10:26 PM
Thursday	-	11:48 AM	11:18 PM
Friday	-	12:30 PM	-
Saturday	12:08 AM	1:09 PM	-

AROUND THE GLOBE		▲ ▼ °F
Auckland	Showers	72° / 61°
Beijing	Sunny	28° / 10°
Hong Kong	Cloudy	61° / 55°
Honolulu	Showers	83° / 73°
London	Cloudy	35° / 29°
Los Angeles	Showers	56° / 40°
Manila	Scattered Thunderstorms	88° / 78°
Melbourne	Rain	62° / 47°
Miami	Showers	80° / 72°
New York	Partly Cloudy	41° / 26°
Osaka	Partly Cloudy	55° / 41°
Paris	Cloudy	36° / 31°
Busan	Sunny	46° / 32°
Rome	Light Rain	50° / 44°
Salem	Partly Cloudy	70° / 54°
San Francisco	Partly Cloudy	53° / 37°
Seoul	Snow Showers	37° / 13°
Tokyo	Rain	52° / 45°
Washington, DC	Partly Cloudy	45° / 27°

TIDES: SAIPAN HARBOR TODAY		FEET
4:36 AM	Low Tide	-0.31
12:18 PM	High Tide	1.57
5:45 PM	Low Tide	1.14
9:35 PM	High Tide	1.38

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FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF NOVEMBER 1, 2022

DEPARTURES

SAIPAN-GUAM (GUM)

UA117	9:50AM	10:35AM	Daily

SAIPAN- NARITA (NRT)

UA824	7:05AM	9:45AM	1, 3, 5

GUAM-MANILA (MNL)

PR 111	6:00AM	7:45AM	Daily
UA193	7:55PM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Palau
UA183	8:00PM	9:50PM	Daily

SAIPAN-MANILA (MNL)

UA117/183	9:50AM	9:50PM	Daily via Guam
UA117/193	9:50AM	11:50PM	2, 5 via Guam, Palau
OZ624/701	3:40PM	10:35AM+1	3,6 via Incheon

SAIPAN-INCHEON (ICN)

OZ624	3:40PM	7:40PM	3, 6
TW308	4:30PM	8:20PM	3, 4, 6, 7
7C3405	4:35PM	8:25PM	Daily

SAIPAN-BUSAN (PUS)

BX621	3:10PM	6:30PM	3, 7

ARRIVALS

GUAM (GUM)-SAIPAN

UA174	8:00AM	8:46AM	Daily

NARITA (NRT)-SAIPAN

UA825	9:25PM	2:00AM+1	2, 4, 7

MANILA (MNL)-GUAM

PR110	10:05PM	3:55AM+1	Daily
UA184	10:55PM	4:45AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6, 7
UA192	10:40PM	6:30AM+1	2, 5 via Palau
UA184	12:40AM	6:30AM	3, 6

MANILA (MNL)-SAIPAN

UA189/174	12:40AM	8:46AM+1	3, 6 via Guam
UA184/174	10:55PM	8:46AM+1	1, 3, 4, 6,7 via Guam
UA192/174	10:40PM	8:46AM+1	2, 5 via Palau, Guam
OZ704/623	11:50PM	2:40PM+1	2, 5 via Incheon

INCHEON (ICN)-SAIPAN

OZ623	9:00AM	2:40PM	3, 6
TW307	10:00AM	3:30PM	3, 4, 6, 7
7C3406	10:10AM	3:30PM	Daily

BUSAN (PUS)-SAIPAN

BX622	8:00AM	1:10PM	3, 7

LEGEND: Days: Monday (1), Tuesday (2), Wednesday (3), Thursday (4), Friday (5), Saturday (6) and Sunday (7); UA United Airlines; PR, Philippine Airlines; TW, T'Way Air; OZ, Asiana Airlines; 7C, Jeju Air; BX, Air Busan • ETD: Estimated Time of Departure; ETA: Estimated Time of Arrival. *(The Saipan Tribune is not responsible for any changes in the schedule.)*

MARIANAS SOUTHERN AIRWAYS

INITIAL DAILY FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF AUGUST 18, 2022

SAIPAN TO TINIAN

DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
7:00 A.M.	7:15 A.M.	(Except Sundays)
9:50 A.M.	10:05 A.M.	
4:00 P.M.	4:15 P.M.	(Except Saturdays)

TINIAN TO SAIPAN

DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
7:35 A.M.	7:50 A.M.	(Except Sundays)
10:25 A.M.	10:40 A.M.	
4:35 P.M.	4:50 P.M.	(Except Saturdays)

SAIPAN TO ROTA

DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
8:10 A.M.	8:40 A.M.	
1:45 P.M.	2:15 P.M.	

ROTA TO SAIPAN

DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
9:00 A.M.	9:30 A.M.	
2:35 P.M.	3:05 P.M.	

SAIPAN TO GUAM

DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
11:10 A.M.	12:00 P.M.	
5:15 P.M.	6:05 P.M.	

GUAM TO SAIPAN

DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
12:30 P.M.	1:20 P.M.	
6:40 P.M.	7:30 P.M.	

STAR MARIANAS AIR, INC.

FLIGHT SCHEDULE AS OF JUNE 1, 2022

SAIPAN TO ROTA

FLIGHT #	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1301	8:30	9:00	Daily
1302	11:00	11:30	Mon/Wed/Fri
1302	12:00	12:30	Tues/Thurs/ Sat/Sun
1303	15:30	16:00	Daily

ROTA TO SAIPAN

FLIGHT #	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3101	9:30	10:00	Daily
3102	13:00	13:30	Tues/Thurs/ Sat/Sun
3102	14:00	14:30	Mon/Wed/Fri
3103	16:30	17:00	Daily

ROTA TO GUAM

LIGHT #	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
3401	12:00	12:30	Mon/Wed/Fri

GUAM TO ROTA

FLIGHT #	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
4301	13:00	13:30	Mon/Wed/Fri

SAIPAN TO TINIAN

FLIGHT #	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
1202	8:00	8:15	Daily
1203	9:00	9:15	Daily
1204	10:00	10:15	Daily
1208	14:00	14:15	Daily
1209	15:00	15:15	Daily
1210	16:00	16:15	Daily
1211	17:00	17:15	Daily

TINIAN TO SAIPAN

FLIGHT #	DEPARTS	ARRIVES	FREQUENCY
2102	8:30	8:45	Daily
2103	9:30	9:45	Daily
2104	10:30	10:45	Daily
2108	14:30	14:45	Daily
2109	15:30	15:45	Daily
2110	16:30	16:45	Daily
2111	17:30	17:45	Daily

Business

Learn the magic of dance at Saipan Studio

By LEIGH GASES
leigh_gases@saipantribune.com
CORRESPONDENT

Saipan Studio, a dance studio led by instructor Jasmine Liang, teaches the magic of dance through professional dance education to children and adults alike.

The dance studio primarily teaches various forms of dance including ballet, jazz, and modern to young children ages 4-16 and to adults as well. They also have studio space available for those looking to practice on their own. They seasonally have adult exercise and yoga classes available.

For the dance classes, the schedule is every Wednesday from 4:30pm to 5:30pm, for children aged 4 to 6; Thursday from 8:30am to 9:30am for adults, and 3:30pm to 4:30pm for children aged 4 to 6; Friday, from 3:30pm to 5:30pm for children ages 10 to 16; and Saturday from 9am to 10:30am for children aged 7 to 10, while from 10:30am to 12:30pm are for children aged 10 to 16 years old.

The dance studio is located on the second floor above Kylie's Bakeshop and across from Eucon International School along Middle Road.

Liang, wife and mother of two, started her dance career at the age of 4 in China.

She brings six years of professional dance training from Sichuan Dancing School and has completed an undergraduate degree with a dual major in education and dance from Southwest University, in Chongqing, China.

Liang is also one of the youngest people to be recognized by the China Dancers Association, which granted her a national certification to train and certify new dance teachers. She is regularly requested to appear on national television as a judge for dance competitions. She was recognized as a business leader and invited to an international convention for business collaboration and innovation in Chongqing, China, because of her contribution to art development in the city.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Saipan Studio dance students are seen executing a dance move during one of their lessons in the Saipan Studio dance class in Middle Road.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Saipan Studio dance students are seen following along with dance instructor Jiaxin Liang, front right, during one of their performances in the Taste of Marianas.

She continues teaching her passion of dance through her studio, which she opened in March of this year, and hopes to brighten the lives of young women in the CNMI through the magic of dance.

Liang moved to Saipan in 2016 and has since then worked closely with the Saipan Mayor's Office, Marianas Visitors Authority, the CNMI Women's Association, and the Department of Community and Cultural Affairs.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Saipan Studio is located on the second floor above Kylie's Bakeshop and across from Eucon International School along Middle Road.

She performs with her students at least every three months, with her students having performed during the Flame Tree Arts Festival, Taste of the Marianas, and Fiesta Fridays held at the NMI Museum Grounds, among other events. She looks forward to her dance students performing in Guam in the near future.

For more information and class prices, contact Liang at (670)-989-3303 or email her at JiaxinLiang33@gmail.com.

Shoppers, workers clash over post-pandemic expectations

NEW YORK (AP)—Before the pandemic, Cheryl Woodard used to take her daughter and her friends to eat at a local IHOP in Laurel, Maryland after their dance practice. But now they hardly go there anymore because it closes too early.

"It is a little frustrating because it's not as convenient as it used to be," said Woodard, 54, who also does most of her shopping online these days instead of in person because of stores limiting their hours.

Before the pandemic, consumers had gotten accustomed to instant gratification: packages and groceries delivered to their doorstep in less than an hour, stores that stayed open around the clock to serve their every need.

But more than two and a half years later in a world yearning for normalcy, many workers are fed up and don't want to go back to the way things were. They are demanding better schedules, and sometimes even quitting their jobs altogether.

As a consequence, many businesses still haven't been able to resume the same hours of operations or services as they continue to grapple with labor shortages. Others have made changes in the name of efficiency. For instance, Walmart, the nation's largest retailer and private employer, announced this past summer it doesn't have any plans for its supercenters to return to its pre-pandemic 24-hour daily operations.

IHOP says a vast majority of its locations have returned to their pre-pandemic hours and some have even expanded them. But others, like the Laurel location that Woodward used to frequent, have indeed cut back.

The changes are creating a disconnect between customers who want to shop and dine like they used to during pre-pandemic times and exhausted employees who no longer want to work those long hours — a push-pull that is only being heightened during the busy holiday shopping season.

"Nobody is winning," said Sadie Cherney, a franchise owner with three resale Clothes Mentor boutiques in South Carolina. "It is so demoralizing to see that you are falling short on both ends."

China to drop travel tracing as it relaxes 'zero-COVID'

BEIJING (AP)—China will drop a travel tracing requirement as part of an uncertain exit from its strict "zero-COVID" policies that have elicited widespread dissatisfaction.

At midnight on Monday, the smart phone app will cease to function, meaning residents' travels will not be traced and recorded, potentially reducing the likelihood they will be forced into quarantine for visiting pandemic hot spots. China's ruling Communist Party allows no independent parties to conduct verification and such apps have been used in past to suppress travel and free speech. It's part of a package of apps that includes the health code, which has yet to be disabled.

The move follows the government's snap announcement last week that it was ending many of the most draconian measures. That follows three years of lockdowns, travel restrictions and quarantines on those moving between provinces and cities, mandated testing, and requirements that a clean bill of health be shown to access public areas.

Last month in Beijing and several other cities, protests over the restrictions grew into calls for leader Xi Jinping and the ruling Communist Party step down, in a level of public political expression not seen in decades.

While met with relief, the relaxation has also sparked concerns about a new wave of infections potentially overwhelming health care resources in some areas.

Xi's government is still officially committed to stopping virus transmission, the last major country to try. But the latest moves suggest the party will tolerate more cases without quarantines or shutting down travel or businesses as it winds down its "zero-COVID" strategy.

Facing a surge in COVID-19 cases, China is setting up more intensive care facilities and trying to strengthen hospitals' ability to deal with severe cases.

At the same time, the government reversed course by allowing those with mild symptoms to recuperate at home rather than being sent to field hospitals that have become notorious for overcrowding and poor hygiene.

Nation

Young voters' enthusiasm for Democrats waned during midterms

WASHINGTON (AP)—Young voters who have been critical to Democratic successes in recent elections showed signs in November's midterms that their enthusiasm may be waning. a potential warning sign for a party that will need their strong backing heading into the 2024 presidential race.

Voters under 30 went 53% for Democratic House candidates compared with only 41% for Republican candidates nationwide, according to AP VoteCast, a sweeping national survey of the electorate. But that level of support for Democrats was down compared with 2020, when such voters supported President Joe Biden over his predecessor, Donald Trump, 61% to 36%. And in 2018, when Democrats used a midterm surge to retake control of the House, voters 18 to 29 went 64% for the party compared with 34% for the GOP.

Biden's party nonetheless exceeded midterm expectations, holding the Senate and surrendering only a small Republican House majority. The president himself hailed young voter turnout as "historic." Still, the trend line for younger voters may be an early indicator of the Democrats' challenge to maintain the coalition of Black people, women, college-educated voters, city dwellers and suburbanites that has buoyed the party in the years since Trump won the White House.

Weakness in any part of that voting bloc could have implications during the next presidential race. Biden, who will be a few weeks shy of his 82nd birthday on Election Day 2024, says he intends to run again. Trump, 76, has already announced his candidacy.

AP

Voters wait in line at a polling place at the Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs in Austin, Texas, on election night Nov. 8, 2022.

"There might have been retrenchment in youth voters," said Michael McDonald, a political science professor at the University of Florida and an expert on voting and data.

McDonald cautioned against reading too much into what could be an anomaly. But he said the shift may have been fueled by issues like high inflation, which has hit young people especially hard since their wages are less likely to increase fast enough to keep pace with rising prices.

"Youngest people also have the weakest partisan attachments, so they can be more susceptible to partisan swings nationally," McDonald said. "There's no reason why Republicans can't rebound among younger people."

Indeed, VoteCast shows only about a quarter of Democrats under 30 say being a Democrat is "extremely" or "very" important to them, compared with roughly a third of older Democrats.

The data showed that voters under 30 did not support Democrats decisively enough to sway key races nationally, but the news wasn't all bad for the party. Midterm voters under 45—an age bracket that includes Generation Z and millennials—backed Biden's party at rates that exceeded his 2020 support in races for governor of Pennsylvania, Michigan and Kansas, as well as the race for Senate in Pennsylvania.

Democratic Lt. Gov. John Fetterman beat Republican celebrity heart surgeon Dr. Mehmet Oz in Pennsylvania's Senate contest while getting 62% of the vote of those 18 to 44. That was slightly better than Biden's 56% with such voters in 2020. In the Pennsylvania governor's race, Democrat Josh Shapiro also won while outpacing Biden's support in 2020, earning 64% of that age group.

Kansas Gov. Laura Kelly won a second term by modestly outperforming 2020 margins with voters under 45 in the red state, 52% to Biden's 45%. Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer also commandingly secured reelection while garnering a somewhat larger percentage of the state's voters under 45 in 2022, 61%, than Biden did in 2020, 54%.

Michigan allows people to register to vote on Election Day, which prompted such long lines on college campuses that the last ballot cast at the University of Michigan came at 2:05 a.m.

2nd Oath Keepers Jan. 6 sedition trial to get underway

WASHINGTON (AP)—After securing seditious conspiracy convictions against two leaders of the Oath Keepers, the Justice Department will begin Monday to try to make its Capitol riot case against four others affiliated with the far-right extremist group.

Openings statements are expected in Washington's federal court less than two weeks after Stewart Rhodes, the founder of the Oath Keepers, and Kelly Meggs, who led its Florida chapter, were convicted of seditious conspiracy for what prosecutors described as a violent plot to overturn President Joe Biden's victory.

The defendants facing jurors in the latest trial are Joseph Hackett, of Sarasota, Florida; Roberto Minuta of Prosper, Texas; David Moerschel of Punta Gorda, Florida; and Edward Vallejo of Phoenix. They are charged with several other felonies in addition to seditious conspiracy.

While the Rhodes' and Meggs' verdicts were a major victory for the Justice Department, three of their co-defendants were acquitted of seditious conspiracy. The major question in the next trial is whether prosecutors will be convince jurors to convict lower-level defendants of the Civil War-era offense.

Seditious conspiracy can be difficult to prove, especially when the alleged plot is unsuccessful. Rhodes and Meggs were the first people in decades found guilty at trial of the charge, which carries up to 20 years in prison.

Thomas Caldwell, of Berryville Virginia; Jessica Watkins of Woodstock, Ohio; and Kenneth Harrelson of Titusville, Florida, were acquitted of sedition. But all five defendants in that case were convicted of obstructing Congress' certification of Biden's electoral win, which also calls for as many as 20 years behind bars.

Prosecutors will try to convince jurors that Minuta, Moerschel, Vallejo and Hackett plotted with Rhodes and others to use force to stop the transfer of presidential power from Donald Trump to Biden. Authorities say the plot came to a head on Jan. 6, 2021, when Oath Keepers stormed the Capitol alongside hundreds of other angry Trump supporters.

In Rhodes' case, prosecutors spent weeks arguing they were not whipped into an impulsive frenzy by Trump on Jan. 6 but came to Washington intent on keeping Trump in power at all costs. Authorities say the Oath Keepers discussed their plans in encrypted chats for weeks before the riot and stashed weapons at a nearby Virginia hotel in case they were needed to support their plot.

But while investigators combed through thousands of messages sent by Rhodes and his co-defendants, none specifically spelled out a plan to attack the Capitol itself. Defense attorneys emphasized that fact throughout the trial to argue there was never any plot. They said the Oath Keepers didn't come to Washington for violence but to provide security for people like Trump ally Roger Stone at events before the riot.

Authorities say Hackett and Moerschel were part of the first group of Oath Keepers along with Meggs and Watkins that pushed into the Capitol in military-style stack formation. Minuta later joined a second "stack" that forced its way inside as police desperately tried to defend the building, prosecutors say.

ACROSS THE NATION

Arizona Gov. Ducey stacks containers on border at term's end

SAN RAFAEL VALLEY, Arizona (AP)—Work crews have steadily erected hundreds of double-stacked shipping containers topped by razor wire along Arizona's remote eastern boundary with Mexico in a bold show of border enforcement by Republican Gov. Doug Ducey even as he prepares to leave office.

Until protesters slowed, then largely halted the work in recent days, Ducey pressed forward over the objections of the U.S. government, environmentalists and an incoming governor who has called it a poor use of resources.

Democratic Gov.-elect Katie Hobbs said last week she was "looking at all the options" and hasn't decided what to do about the containers after her Jan. 5. inauguration. She previously suggested the containers be repurposed as affordable housing, an increasingly popular option for homeless and low-income people.

"I don't know how much it will cost to remove the containers and what the cost will be," Hobbs told Phoenix PBS TV station KAET in an interview Wednesday.

NASA Orion capsule safely blazes back from moon, aces test

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP)—NASA's Orion capsule made a blisteringly fast return from the moon Sunday, parachuting into the Pacific off Mexico to conclude a test flight that should clear the way for astronauts on the next lunar flyby.

The incoming capsule hit the atmosphere at Mach 32, or 32 times the speed of sound, and endured reentry temperatures of 5,000 degrees Fahrenheit (2,760 degrees Celsius) before splashing down west of Baja California near Guadalupe Island. A Navy ship quickly moved in to recover the spacecraft and its silent occupants — three test dummies rigged with vibration sensors and radiation monitors.

NASA hailed the descent and splashdown as close to perfect, as congratulations poured in from Washington..

"I'm overwhelmed," NASA Administrator Bill Nelson said from Mission Control in Houston. "This is an extraordinary day ... It's historic because we are now going back into space — deep space — with a new generation."

The space agency needed a successful splashdown to stay on track for the next Orion flight around the moon, targeted for 2024 with four astronauts who will be revealed early next year. That would be followed by a two-person lunar landing as early as 2025 and, ultimately, a sustainable moon base. The long-term plan would be to launch a Mars expedition by the late 2030s.

3 bald eagles die, 10 sick after eating euthanized animals

INVER GROVE HEIGHTS, Minn. (AP)—At least 13 bald eagles were likely poisoned by scavenging the carcasses of euthanized animals that were improperly dumped at a Minnesota landfill, and three of the majestic birds have died.

The Minneapolis Star Tribune reports that state and federal wildlife officials are investigating after the eagles were found this month near the Pine Bend Landfill in the Minneapolis suburb of Inver Grove Heights.

Ten of the birds are in intensive care at the University of Minnesota Raptor Center. The center's executive director Victoria Hall said she is optimistic those birds will recover.

Hall said when the eagles were found some of them were lying motionless, face down in the snow, and Raptor Center workers weren't sure if they were still alive. Veterinarians suspect that the eagles that died had eaten part of a carcass of an animal that had been euthanized with pentobarbital, and investigators confirmed that some euthanized animals had been brought to the landfill on Dec. 2.

Asia

China's Xi vows to buy more Mideast oil as US focus wanes

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP)—Chinese leader Xi Jinping vowed on Friday to import more oil and natural gas from energy-rich Gulf Arab states while not interfering in their affairs, likely seeking to cast Beijing in a more favorable light than Washington as America's attention in the region wanes.

Xi also urged the Arab countries to conduct energy sales in the Chinese yuan, potentially divorcing the U.S. dollar from transactions in a region where the United States still stations thousands of troops across a network of local bases as a hedge against Iran.

China's hands-off approach could appeal to leaders such as Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, who stands ready to rule the oil-rich kingdom for possibly decades, even after facing widespread international criticism over the killing of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi and the still-raging war in Yemen.

During Xi's visit to Saudi Arabia this week, the prince himself welcomed him to a meeting of the clubby Gulf Cooperation Council, and later to a wider summit of Mideast leaders.

"Standing at the crossroads of history, we must renew the tradition of friendship between China and the GCC," Xi said.

Xi's visit comes as China relies on the Gulf Arab states, particularly Saudi Arabia, for billions of dollars in crude oil imports to power his country's economy as it tries to slowly ease out of its strict anti-coronavirus policy. Xi faced protests at home just before his arrival in Riyadh that represent the most-serious challenge to his rule after being awarded a third five-year term as the Communist party leader.

"The kingdom believes that hydrocarbon energy sources will remain an important resource to meet the needs of the world for the coming decades," Prince Mohammed said.

Brent crude traded Friday around $76 a barrel — down from highs of $122 in June. Higher prices could see the prince's dreams of a $500 billion futuristic city of Neom on the Red Sea to overhaul the Saudi economy come true. But rising costs at the pump months earlier further alienated the administration of President Joe Biden from Riyadh — something the prince likely kept in mind during Xi's visit.

Xi praised the GCC countries — Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates — as they "actively sought political solutions to regional hotspots" and invited their astronauts to China's new Tiangong space station.

Xi also said China plans to build a joint China-GCC Nuclear Security Demonstration Center that will train 300 personnel on nuclear safety and technology. Already, the UAE has the Barakah Nuclear Power Plant, built with South Korea under a strict agreement that it will not enrich uranium — a possible pathway to a nuclear weapon.

But perhaps most importantly for the Gulf states, Xi stressed his nation will keep being a major buyer of their oil.

"China will continue to import a large amount of crude oil from the GCC countries, expand imports of liquefied natural gas, strengthen the engineering services in oil and gas upstream development and the cooperation in storage, transportation and refining," Xi said.

He also called on the GCC to use yuan to settle transactions.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict came up as Xi spoke with the Arab leaders, especially Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. Xi said China remains committed to an independent Palestinian state based on the 1967 boundaries of Israel.

"The Palestine issue is vital to the peace and stability in the Middle East," Xi said. "The historical injustice suffered by the Palestinian people cannot continue indefinitely. The legitimate national interests cannot be traded. The demand for an independent state cannot be vetoed."

Xi also called for nations to "strengthen exchanges among civilizations."

"We need to jointly oppose Islamophobia, carry out cooperation in deradicalization, and oppose linking terrorism with specific ethnic groups and specific religions," he said.

However, Xi made no mention his nation's harsh policies toward Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities. More than a million have been sent to detention centers, forced to denounce Islam and swear fealty to Xi and the party. Saudi Arabia, home to the holiest sites in Islam, also has provided political cover to China amid the crackdown.

ASIAN BRIEFS

Pakistani army: Afghan forces shell border town, killing 6

QUETTA, Pakistan (AP)—Deadly shelling from Afghan forces killed 6 people in a border town on Sunday, Pakistan's military said, as relations continue to sour between the neighboring countries.

The violence hitting Chaman in southwestern Pakistan follows a series of deadly incidents and attacks that have skyrocketed tensions with Afghanistan's Taliban rulers. Chaman is the main border crossing for trade between the countries.

The Pakistani army's media wing said the fire wounded 17 people and blamed the casualties on the "unprovoked and indiscriminate fire" of heavy weapons by Afghan forces on civilians.

In Afghanistan, a spokesman for Kandahar's governor, Ataullah Zaid, appeared to link the clashes between Pakistani and Taliban forces with the construction of new checkpoints on the Afghan side of the border. He said one Taliban fighter was killed and 10 were wounded. Three civilians were also injured, he added.

Myanmar rescues 154 Rohingya from boat in distress

BANGKOK (AP)—More than 150 Rohingya have been rescued off the coast of Myanmar after their boat started taking on water, Myanmar's military said.

Myanmar's state-run Oil and Natural Gas Corporation sent two boats from an offshore operation to rescue the 154 people — 106 males and 48 females — after spotting their boat in trouble, the military said in a statement Thursday.

It was not clear whether the vessel was the same boat carrying Rohingya refugees from Bangladesh that had been reported to be in trouble earlier this week in the waters of neighboring Thailand.

Thailand's navy spokesman Vice Admiral Pokkrong Monthatphalin said Friday that crews had been sent to look for the boat in the Andaman Sea after it received the reports, but had found nothing.

UNHCR, the United Nations' Refugee Agency, said it did not have independent information on the boat reportedly experiencing engine troubles in Thai waters, but urged countries in the area to help.

World

Libyan accused in Lockerbie bombing now in US custody

AP

A police officer walks by the nose of Pan Am flight 103 in a field near the town of Lockerbie, Scotland where it lay after a bomb aboard exploded, killing a total of 270 people, Wednesday, Dec. 21, 1988.

WASHINGTON (AP)—A Libyan intelligence official accused of making the bomb that brought down Pan Am Flight 103 over Lockerbie, Scotland, in 1988 in an international act of terrorism has been taken into U.S. custody and will face federal charges in Washington, the Justice Department said Sunday.

The arrest of Abu Agila Mohammad Mas'ud Kheir Al-Marimi is a milestone in the decades-old investigation into the attack that killed 259 people in the air and 11 on the ground. American authorities in December 2020 announced charges against Mas'ud, who was in Libyan custody at the time. Though he is the third Libyan intelligence official charged in the U.S. in connection with the attack, he would be the first to appear in an American courtroom for prosecution.

The New York-bound Pan Am flight exploded over Lockerbie less than an hour after takeoff from London on Dec. 21, 1988. Citizens from 21 different countries were killed. Among the 190 Americans on board were 35 Syracuse University students flying home for Christmas after a semester abroad.

The bombing laid bare the threat of international terrorism more than a decade before the Sept. 11 attacks. It produced global investigations and punishing sanctions while spurring demands for accountability from victims of those killed. The university's current chancellor, Kent Syverud, said in a statement that the arrest was a significant development in the long process "to bring those responsible for this despicable act to justice."

Stephanie Bernstein, a Maryland woman whose husband, Michael, was among the 270 victims — he was a Justice Department official returning on the flight from government business — said the news was "surreal" because there had been times in the past two years when victims' families had been told that "it looks promising" only to find that was not the case.

Second Iranian detainee executed over alleged protest crime

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP)—Iran said Monday it executed a second prisoner detained and convicted amid nationwide protests challenging the country's theocracy, airing footage on state television it claimed showed him stabbing two men to death and running away.

The public hanging of Majidreza Rahnavard, less than a month after he allegedly carried out the fatal stabbings of two security officials, shows the speed at which Iran now carries out death sentences handed down for those detained in the demonstrations the government hopes to put down.

Activists warn that at least a dozen people already have been sentenced to death in closed-door hearings. At least 488 people have been killed since the demonstrations began in mid-September, according to Human Rights Activists in Iran, a group that's been monitoring the protests. Another 18,200 people have been detained by authorities.

Iran's Mizan news agency, under the country's judiciary, alleged Rahnavard stabbed two security force members to death Nov. 17 in Mashhad and wounded four others.

Footage aired on state TV showed a man chasing another around a street corner, then standing over him and stabbing him after he fell against a parked motorbike. Another showed the same man stabbing another immediately after. The assailant, which state TV alleged was Rahnavard, then fled.

The Mizan report identified the dead as "student" Basij, paramilitary volunteers under Iran's Revolutionary Guard. The Basij (ba-SEEJ') have deployed in major cities, attacking and detaining protesters, who in many cases have fought back.

The Mizan report offered no motive for Rahnavard's alleged attack. The report accused Rahnavard of trying to flee to a foreign country when he was arrested.

Mashhad, a Shiite holy city, is located some 740 kilometers (460 miles) east of the Iranian capital, Tehran. Activists say it has seen strikes, shops closed and demonstrations amid the unrest that began over the Sept. 16 death in custody of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old woman who had been detained by Iran's morality police.

Overdrive

2023 Hyundai Elantra Hybrid will surprise you

By LARRY PRINTZ
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

We are living in the age of cynicism, when everyone seems jaded, as if nothing surprises us anymore. So, when something does deliver more than you'd expect, it's a genuine delight. Such is the case with 2023 Hyundai Elantra Hybrid Limited compact sedan, starting price, $24,400—or about half of the typical cost of a new vehicle.

Yet despite its size, it offers as much interior space as a midsize Toyota Camry. Better yet, it's available in a number of personalities, powered by conventional, high performance or hybrid drivelines. But it's the hybrid electric model that proves perfect, with a combination of performance and fuel efficiency at a price mere mortals can afford, whether choosing the Blue or upscale Limited trim level.

DREW PHILLIPS/HYUNDAI/TNS
The 2023 Hyundai Elantra Hybrid.

Either way, you'll find the Elantra Hybrid wears the same handsomely chiseled lines that characterize its conventionally powered siblings. Its side sculpting accentuates the sloping rear backlight, lending a sense of motion that endows this little sedan with a sporty flair. It's far from the bland designs that typify this segment.

Inside, you'll find that the cabin is fitted with the hard plastic of the class, but untypically, it's nicely textured, with detailing that's unexpectedly attractive. Opting for the Limited trim brings with it an indulgent heap of comfort and convenience features, including a small sunroof, leather trim, heated and ventilated front seats wireless device charging, ambient lighting and dual automatic climate control. OK, it doesn't have a heated steering wheel, but it does have most of the luxury accouterments of a far more expensive automobile—and that's unexpected.

The instrument panel layout has a horizontal orientation thanks to a sizable digital display consisting of the infotainment system and instrument cluster. Thoughtfully, there are physical shortcut buttons for the screen's many functions, and while simple to use, they are very slow to respond. But the tech package is good, as it comes with front USB ports, wireless device charging, navigation, XM Sirius Satellite radio, Bluetooth and Apple CarPlay.

As is typical of compact four-doors, the driving position is low, but legroom both the front and back are generous considering the size of the car. The trunk is a spacious 14.2 cubic feet, although it lacks any grocery bags hooks or cargo net. That's unexpected as well, but not in a good way.

Things get better once it's time to move.

The Elantra Hybrid mates its 104-horsepower, 1.6-liter four-cylinder to an electric motor that together produce 139 horsepower and 195 pound-feet of torque through a responsive eight-speed dual-clutch transmission. That's less than the 147 horsepower generated by the 2.0-liter four-cylinder engine used in conventionally powered Elantras. But those models come with a continuously variable automatic transmission and a less-sophisticated torsion beam rear suspension. Hybrids benefit from a more sophisticated independent rear suspension, a good reason to opt for the hybrid.

Another reason is its sprightly acceleration. It's clearly one of the quicker mainstream compacts, especially once up to speed. The dual clutch transmission shifts swiftly and discreetly, making for a better driving experience compared to the CVT tranny used in other trims. Given its mainstream mission, its light steering comes as no surprise, but it feels too loose and slow at low speeds. Body lean is controlled at low speeds but becomes noticeably more pronounced when pushed hard. Yes, road noise is evident, but it's not objectionable. Bump absorption is reasonable but not as good as that of some competitors. Even so, overall, the Elantra has an ambiance of sophistication above its station.

But the hybrid weighs more than its conventionally powered siblings, and produces fewer ponies. Thus, it's slower off the line, but it proves to be very responsive at speed. Hyundai has yet to imbue its hybrids with the sportiness it's capable of engineering. But this one returned an excellent 50 mpg. Certainly, stretching your fuel budget is this car's exceptional trait, one of many.

The driving experience remains fairly middle of the road, without the crisp athleticism of the sporty Hyundai Elantra N. Yet it remains an enjoyable daily driver, one that makes an inordinate amount of sense, thanks to its roomy cabin, excellent fuel efficiency, an up-to-date tech package and what passes for an affordable price.

It's surprisingly well-rounded.

NUTS & BOLTS

- **2023 Hyundai Elantra Hybrid**
- **Base price:** $24,400
- **Engine:** 1.6-liter Atkinson Cycle four-cylinder
- **Horsepower/Torque:** 139/195 pound-feet
- **EPA fuel economy (city/highway):** 49/52 mpg
- **Observed fuel economy:** 50 mpg
- **Fuel required: 89 Octane**
- **Length/Width/Height:** 184.1/71.9/55.7 inches
- **Ground clearance:** 5.3 inches
- **Payload:** 990 pounds
- **Cargo capacity:** 14.2 cubic feet

Any fix for dashboard?

Q: I own a 2015 Corvette Z06 that has a leather dashboard. The dashboard is shrinking and bubbling up near the windshield and around the opening for the heads-up display. Is there a way to repair or replace the leather?

D.M., Seaham, Massachusetts

A: Although it looks like leather, the dash cover is likely vinyl. I don't know of any way to fix the problem. But there are replacement dash covers available. Most of them are salvaged so checking around with auto recycling businesses or on the internet may be your best bet.

■■■

Q: Just had a harrowing drive in the rain on a two-lane road, blinded by oncoming headlights, exacerbated by reflection on wet road surfaces. Not one driver switched to low beams. Is that a thing of the past? With today's high-intensity headlights, it's more than a courtesy gesture. It's a safety necessity.

P.K., Portland, Connecticut

A: Cars sold in America have a switch to change from high to low beams. A reminder light on the instrument cluster must glow when high beams are selected. The majority of motorists dip their lights to oncoming traffic, but those high-intensity low beams still bother a lot of drivers. I have experimented with anti-glare nighttime glasses but haven't yet found ones I really like. If you wear corrective glasses, always opt for the anti-glare coating.

■■■

Q: I have a 2014 Toyota Avalon with around 73,000 miles. I had front and rear brakes replaced at the Toyota dealer. The brakes squeak when I start up the car and back out of the driveway. I took the car back to the dealer and was told that when brakes are replaced this is a common occurrence on startup as they no longer use asbestos as part of the brakes, which are now metallic. I told them I do not hear the brakes of any other cars on my block, either new or old, squeaking. They replied that even some new cars have squeaking brakes. Truth or not?

R.W., Delray Beach, Florida

A: Brake noise can happen after a brake job and often it goes away after a short while. But if the noise continues, there are solutions such as anti-squeal compound and shims that can stop the high frequency vibrations. Give the brakes a few weeks.

■■■

Q: I have a 2017 Toyota RAV4. When parked outside overnight or in the garage, the front brakes squeal when backing out. Once I go forward, there is no sound when I approach a stop sign or light. The dealer said there's nothing wrong with the brakes. Any ideas as to what could be causing the noise and any solutions? Is there is something I can spray on them?

B.L., Bensenville, Illinois

A: Yes. It is called anti-squeal compound. It is also available in tubes and as a paste. Applying it to the back sides of the pads usually quiets them down. I don't know if it stops the squeal when applied to the backsides of pigs.

■■■

Q: Please settle a disagreement between me and my bride of 37 years. She leaves on the radio, heater and other accessories when she turns off the ignition to her 2019 Honda CR-V. I say this is a slight drain on the battery when the vehicle is restarted. She says it does not matter. Who is correct?

T.D., Chicago

A: Although I am not a qualified marriage counselor, I must agree with the husband. The ignition switch is the master and breaks the circuits for all of the accessories with the key off and bypasses them during cranking.

MOTORMOUTH

By BOB WEBER
Tribune News Service

Bob Weber is a writer and mechanic who became an ASE-certified Master Automobile Technician in 1976. Weber's work has appeared in professional trade magazines and various consumer publications including Consumer Guide and Consumers Digest. Send questions along with name and town to motormouth.tribune@gmail.com.

Life & Style

‘Tár,’ ‘Everything Everywhere’ tie for LA critics’ top award

LOS ANGELES (AP)—Todd Field’s symphonic backstage drama “Tár” and the existential comedy “Everything Everywhere All at Once” tied for top honors with the Los Angeles Film Critics Association in awards announced Sunday.

The critics group opted to split its best film award between the two acclaimed films. “Tár,” which was also chosen as best film by the New York Film Critics Circle, cleaned up in other categories as well. Field won for both directing and screenplay, and Cate Blanchett, who stars as an internationally renowned conductor, won best lead performance. The critics, who don’t separate award by gender, also gave best lead performance to Bill Nighy for the “Ikiru” remake “Living.”

“Everything Everywhere All at Once,” the madcap metaverse movie from Daniel Kwan and Daniel Scheinert, also picked up an award for Ke Huy Quan, for supporting performer. The former child star added to his rapidly increasingly awards haul for his lauded comeback performance. The other supporting performer winner was Dolly de Leon from Ruben Östlund’s class satire “Triangle of Sadness.”

Other winners from LAFCA included Guillermo del Toro’s “Pinocchio” for best animation; Jerzy Skolimowski’s “EO” for best non-English language film; and Laura Poitras’ “All the Beauty and the Bloodshed” for best documentary.

The critics will hand out their awards at a gala on Jan. 14. The French filmmaker Claire Denis was previously announced as the recipient of the group’s career achievement award. Last year, the LAFCA awarded Ryusuke Hamaguchi’s “Drive My Car” best film.

‘It’s fate.’ 40 years later, Ke Huy Quan is a star, again

NEW YORK (AP)—Ke Huy Quan is trying hard not to cry.

He’s been crying a lot lately. Quan tends to get emotional any time he contemplates his sudden reversal of fate. Every since “Everything Everywhere All at Once” opened in theaters earlier this year, 51-year-old Quan—who a lifetime ago was the iconic child star of “Indiana Jones and the Temple of Doom,” as Short Round, and Data in “Goonies”—has been, he says, “overwhelmed by emotions every day.”

“I didn’t think this day would come. It was a day I wanted for so long, for decades. And it’s finally here,” says Quan. “When you have a dream and you kind of bury it because you think it won’t come true, to see it finally come true is incredible.”

“I cry a lot,” he says.

Quan was once one of the most indelible faces—and voices—of the 1980s. He was 12 when he was cast as Harrison Ford’s Yankee-hat-wearing sidekick in “Temple of Doom.” His younger brother, David, auditioned, but Ke caught Spielberg’s eye. Quan

DANA PLEASANT/INVISION/AP

Ke Huy Quan, star of “Everything Everywhere All at Once,” poses for a portrait on Sunday, Nov. 20, 2022, at The London Hotel in West Hollywood, Calif.

starred in 1985’s “Goonies,” too, but found few roles after that. By the time Quan was in his 20s, he had all but disappeared from the screen. Struggling to find a foothold at a time when roles were scarce for Asian American actors, the Vietnamese-born Quan passed into “Where are they now?” territory.

Quan gave up acting. He went back to school to study film at the University of Southern California and transitioned into working behind the camera. Twenty years passed before he acted again. But when Quan was 49, he decided to give it one last go. Two weeks later, he landed his role in “Everything Everywhere All at Once.”

Now, Quan is not just a working actor again, with a string of upcoming roles, he’s being celebrated for one of the best performances of the year. He plays Waymond, the meek husband who transforms in the film’s spiraling multiverses into a fanny-pack-slinging hero and a debonair “In the Mood for Love”-style bachelor. Decades may have passed, but Quan’s sweetly sincere screen presence still shines.

The 51-year-old actor has already picked up awards from the Gotham Awards, the New York Film Critics Circle and has been nominated for a Spirit Award. After spending much of his adult life as an actor just looking for a second chance, Quan may be the favorite to win an Academy Award, for best supporting actor.

“For the longest time, all I wanted was just a job,” Quan says. “Just an opportunity to act, to show people what I can do. This movie, ‘Everything Everywhere All at Once,’ has given me so much beyond anything I could have ever asked for.”

While speaking by Zoom during his day off shooting Anthony and Joe Russo’s “Electric State” in Atlanta,” Quan’s wife was nearby off-camera urging him: “Don’t cry! Don’t cry!” Quan tried. But as he reflected on his full-circle journey, he often found it difficult.

With box office bare, ‘Black Panther’ makes it 5 in a row

NEW YORK (AP)—On one of the quietest weekends of the year in movie theaters, “Black Panther: Wakanda Forever” topped the North American box office for the fifth straight weekend, according to studio estimates Sunday.

With the release of “Avatar: The Way of Water” looming, studios opted not to open any new films in wide release. That enabled Ryan Coogler’s “Black Panther” sequel to further extend its box-office reign. “Wakanda Forever” grossed $11.1 million over the weekend, bringing its domestic total to $409.8 million and its worldwide haul to $767.8 million.

“Wakanda Forever” is the first film since Christopher Nolan’s “Tenet”—the 2020 release that attempted to revive cinemas from pandemic closure in 2020, when almost nothing was being theatrically released—to lead the box-office for five straight weeks.

While it’s common to see a quiet weekend ahead of a potential blockbuster like “The Way of Water,” a little-challenged run like “Wakanda Forever” is enjoying is rare for this time of year. The holiday corridor from Thanksgiving to New Year’s is typically one of Hollywood’s busiest periods. Instead, it’s been a fallow spell, with one of the weakest Thanksgiving weekends ever and only a dribble of wide releases since.

The weekend’s total ticket sales amounted to just $37 million, according to data firm Comscore.

That’s left the industry looking, once again, to James Cameron to fire up the box office. “Avatar: The Way of Water,” the long-awaited sequel to the $2.9-billion-grossing 2009 original, launches in theaters Thursday with expectations of at least a $150 million debut domestically.

“Violent Night,” the R-rated comic action film starring David Harbour as Santa Claus, held well in its second weekend. It stayed in second place, dropping a modest 29%, with $8.7 million.

While many awards hopefuls have struggled to catch on in theaters, Darren Aronofsky’s “The Whale,” starring Brendan Fraser, got off to a strong start. The A24 release grossed $360,000 at six theaters for the year’s best per-screen average. Fraser has been widely celebrated for his performance as a 600-lb. reclusive English teacher trying to reconnect with his estranged daughter (Sadie Sink).

Marriages and illnesses complicate land proposal

DEAR ABBY: My husband and I moved into a new rental house on my best friend’s property a year ago. We love living here. We moved to be closer to my friend, “Noah,” who is like a brother to me. He and his wife live on the same property.

Noah was diagnosed with heart disease two years ago, and was given a year to live. He has surpassed that estimate. He now wants my husband and me to buy the house we are renting. I’m hesitant because Noah’s wife suffers from a mental illness.

She has always been threatened by our close friendship, and if anything goes wrong in her life, she accuses me of sabotaging her. When she’s stable, she’s a nice and generous person, but recently she has been experiencing hallucinations and severe paranoia.

Noah wants us to stay because he needs our support. I’m afraid that after he’s gone, she’ll make our lives miserable and try to contest the ownership of the property. The property is in Noah’s name only. He bought it before they got married. What should I do?

TORN TO PIECES

DEAR TORN: Your question is of a legal nature and in no state of the union am I licensed to give legal advice. That is why you, your husband and Noah need to schedule an appointment (ASAP) to discuss this business matter with an attorney who can give you guidance to ensure your interests are protected if this transaction takes place. Because it won’t solve the issue of Noah’s unstable wife, that question should be up to you and your husband to debate separately.

■■■■

DEAR ABBY: I have been trying to develop a relationship with my half-sister, and I’m getting very mixed messages. She is mostly polite and distant. But then there are times she’ll disinvite me from her child’s birthday party or “unfriend” me on Facebook, etc. She explains later that she did it out of anxiety, and she seems worried about being hurt. She has an excuse every time I ask to get together.

I know she’s affected by our father dying of cancer when she was young (she was 10 or 11), so I attribute her behavior to that and try not to take it personally. However, it hurts, and I’m tempted to give up. It is clear she has no interest in spending time with me. Should I stop trying to engage her? She talks warmly with our other shared relatives but not with me. I don’t think I’ve done anything wrong, so I’m baffled.

SLIGHTED IN MINNESOTA

DEAR SLIGHTED: Your half-sister appears to have emotional challenges in addition to her anxiety. That she would disinvite you to a family function after you had accepted the invitation was rude. It’s time to take the hint and step back. Having a parent in common does not guarantee siblings will have a close relationship. My advice is to go on with your life and quit pushing for something this woman is apparently unable or unwilling to give.

■■■■

DEAR ABBY

By ABIGAIL VAN BUREN

UNIVERSAL PRESS SYNDICATE

Dear Abby is written by Abigail Van Buren, also known as Jeanne Phillips, and was founded by her mother, Pauline Phillips. Contact Dear Abby at www.DearAbby.com or P.O. Box 69440, Los Angeles, CA 90069.

Good advice for everyone – teens to seniors – is in “The Anger in All of Us and How to Deal With It.” To order, send your name and mailing address, plus check or money order for $8 (U.S. funds) to: Dear Abby, Anger Booklet, P.O. Box 447, Mount Morris, IL 61054-0447. (Shipping and handling are included in the price.)

Pastimes

Calvin and Hobbes

By Bill Waterson

SKI RESORTS USE MAN-MADE SNOW.
THEY HAVE SNOW-MAKING MACHINES THAT CAN COVER A WHOLE HILLSIDE.
HINT, HINT.
YOU CAN RELY ON THE WEATHER LIKE EVERY OTHER KID.
12-13
© 1992 Watterson Distributed by Andrews McMeel Syndication

Garfield®

By Jim Davis

THIS YEAR, I HAVE A PLAN TO GET DOUBLE THE PRESENTS
Dear Santa, I have been extra good this year...
TIC TIC TIC TIC
And so has my long-lost twin brother, Bob. Here's his Christmas list...
TIC TIC TIC
JIM DAVIS 12-13
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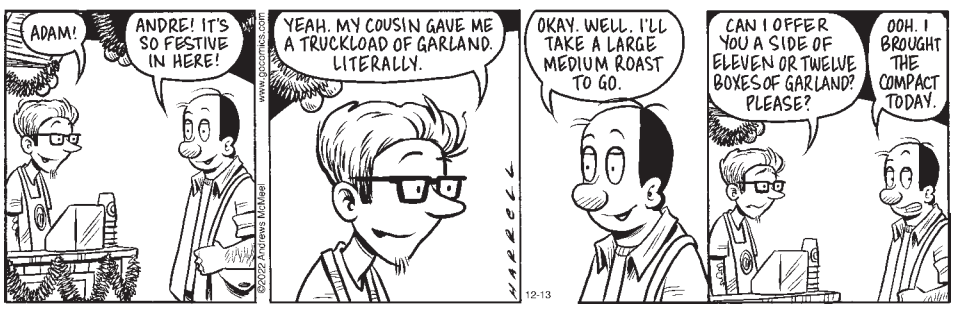
Adam@home

By Bryan Basset


ADAM!
ANDRE! IT'S SO FESTIVE IN HERE!
YEAH. MY COUSIN GAVE ME A TRUCKLOAD OF GARLAND. LITERALLY.
OKAY. WELL. I'LL TAKE A LARGE MEDIUM ROAST TO GO.
CAN I OFFER YOU A SIDE OF ELEVEN OR TWELVE BOXES OF GARLAND? PLEASE?
OOH. I BROUGHT THE COMPACT TODAY.
12-13
©2022 Andrews McMeel
www.gocomics.com

The Duplex

By Glenn McCoy

I JUST CAN'T GET INTO THE CHRISTMAS SPIRIT. CAN YOU HELP ME?
I HAVE TWO DIFFERENT THERAPY OPTIONS.
I'LL GO WITH WHICHEVER'S THE CHEAPEST.
HERE. SMASH THIS MARIAH CAREY ALBUM.
12-13
©2022 Glen McCoy/dist. by Andrews McMeel Syndication www.gocomics.com

CROSSWORD

By Eugene Sheffer

ACROSS

1 Perukes
5 "Angie" actor
8 "— of Eden"
12 Writer Buchanan
13 Pierced body part
14 Iowa city
15 Fashionable shop
17 Hiking snack
18 Check-cashing needs
19 Improvises
21 Public outburst
24 Party cheese
25 Big name in cosmetics
26 Outlaw hunter's rewards
30 Performance
31 "All systems —!"
32 Doo follower
33 Massive rocks
35 Saab model
36 Meadows
37 Cover with fabric
38 Manually
41 After-tax amount
42 Peregrinate
43 Puffy hairdo
48 Water, to Juan
49 Toronto's prov.
50 "Exodus" author
51 Guys' friends
52 Ballot marks
53 Bowling spot

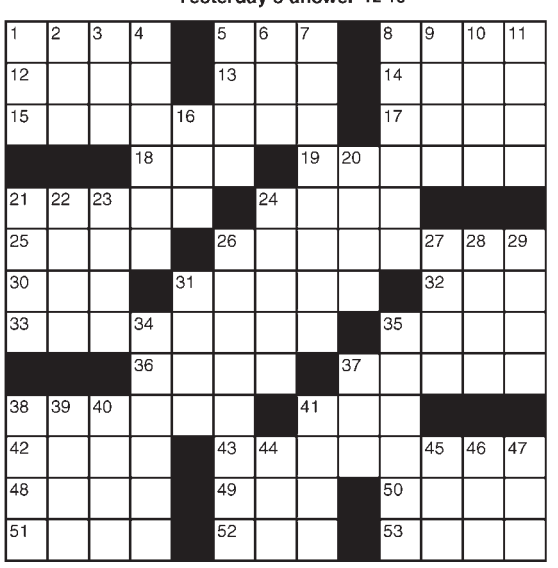
DOWN

1 Spider's creation
2 Altar vow
3 Bearded antelope
4 Lustrous
5 Mandatory coll. courses
6 Vichy water
7 Floor coverings
8 Aerie baby
9 Mine, to Marcel
10 Belgrade resident
11 Recipe amts.
16 Chemical suffix
20 Flintstones' pet
21 Wound cover
22 Designer Chanel
23 Words to a backstabber
24 1899 fighters
26 Challah holder
27 Notion
28 Virgil or Wyatt
29 Pump, for one
31 Mideast gulf
34 Andean beasts
35 Clever
37 Dict. info
38 Boast
39 Meditative practice
40 Tow
41 "Darn it!"
44 Small bill
45 Football's Parseghian
46 Diarist Anaïs
47 Mao — -tung

Solution time: 22 mins.

J	E	T		S	A	M	B	A		Q	T	S
A	A	H		L	I	M	E	S		U	A	R
B	R	O	D	E	R	I	C	K		I	S	O
			R	E	D		K	N	A	C	K	S
D	A	Y	S	P	A		Y	O	L	K		
R	C	A		S	T	E		T	E	P	I	D
E	R	R	S		E	T	C		S	I	D	E
G	O	D	O	T		S	I	P		C	E	L
		S	U	R	F		R	A	C	K	E	T
P	O	T	P	I	E		C	R	O			
A	M	I		B	A	I	L	I	W	I	C	K
P	A	C		E	S	T	E	S		V	E	E
A	R	K		S	T	A	S	H		S	O	Y

Yesterday's answer 12-13



STUMPED? For answers to today's crossword, call **1-900-226-5955**! 99¢ per minute, touch-tone/rotary phones. (18+ only.) A King Features service, NYC.

CELEBRITIES BORN ON THIS DAY: Taylor Swift, 33; Jamie Foxx, 55; Wendie Malick, 72; Dick Van Dyke, 97.

Happy Birthday: Clear up unfinished business and ease stress. Closing out one year and opening another with a clean slate will empower you to incorporate plans that will add to your stability and make you feel secure moving forward. Simplify your life by gravitating toward people who ground you instead of toward those who cause havoc and negativity. Choose peace over chaos. Your numbers are 4, 9, 15, 22, 27, 37, 42.

ARIES *(March 21-April 19):* Listen carefully, and you'll avoid a dispute. It's not worth your time to start a feud with someone who doesn't share your beliefs. Put your energy into being the best you can be and making a positive difference to those you encounter. ✪✪✪✪

TAURUS *(April 20-May 20):* If you crave change, do something simple and fun rather than extensive and expensive. Use your connections to find out what's going on and how you can use what's trending to get ahead. Do things right, not in haste. ✪✪

GEMINI *(May 21-June 20):* Not so fast. Time is on your side, and doing your due diligence will pay off. Focus on what's important to you and the responsibilities that need your attention. Don't leave yourself short because you feel you must clean up someone else's mistake. ✪✪✪✪

CANCER *(June 21-July 22):* Draw on your insight and creative talent to make self-improvements. Promote what you love to do and turn it into a commercial venture. Avoid shared expenses or picking up after others. Protect what you've worked so hard to achieve. ✪✪✪

LEO *(July 23-Aug. 22):* If you want something, speed up the process, and don't stop until you are satisfied with the results. Do your best to help others along the way and share your success with those you love. A positive attitude will attract helpers. ✪✪✪

VIRGO *(Aug. 23-Sept. 22):* Promote change and make things happen. Your enthusiasm and drive will help draw attention and support for you to achieve something new and exciting. A little charm will go a long way regarding love, personal gain and happiness. Romance is encouraged. ✪✪✪

LIBRA *(Sept. 23-Oct. 22):* Learn all you can before you make a move or say something you'll regret. Discipline will be a necessity to reach your goals. Do what you can to be of help, but don't neglect your responsibilities in the interim. Do what's right. ✪✪✪✪

SCORPIO *(Oct. 23-Nov. 21):* Don't back yourself into a corner personally or professionally. Take time to go through the process from start to finish before deciding on what's best for you. A move may not be welcomed by loved ones. Be patient, but don't give up on your dreams. ✪✪

SAGITTARIUS *(Nov. 22-Dec. 21):* Listen carefully; misinformation is heading your way. Verify information before you pass it along or alter your course due to what you hear. Searching for truth will enlighten you and encourage you to make a positive move. Hard work will pay off. ✪✪✪✪✪

EUGENIA LAST

THE LAST WORD IN ASTROLOGY

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CAPRICORN *(Dec. 22-Jan. 19):* Address financial, medical or legal issues before time runs out. Don't leave anything to chance or in someone else's hands. Make positive changes to your home and share your time and space with friends and family. A unique offer is heading your way. ✪✪✪

AQUARIUS *(Jan. 20-Feb. 18):* Make a promise to yourself or someone you love that will show how you feel and how committed you are to a project, decision or plan. Added discipline, coupled with emotion and desire, will lead to better days ahead. ✪✪✪

PISCES *(Feb. 19-March 20):* Abide by the rules and make sure your paperwork is updated. The more you do now, the easier it will be to enjoy the festive season. Transition into next year with a clean slate and a plan that excites you. ✪✪✪

Birthday Baby: You are ambitious, charming and emotional. You are creative and generous.

✪: Avoid conflicts; work behind the scenes. ✪✪: You can accomplish, but don't rely on others. ✪✪✪: Focus and you'll reach your goals. ✪✪✪✪: Aim high; start new projects. ✪✪✪✪✪: Nothing can stop you; go for gold.

SUDOKU

Conceptis Sudoku *By Dave Green*

3								7
			8		2			
2			4	7	1			5
	5	4				7	3	
		1				6		
	2	6				5	1	
5			1	2	6			4
			7		9			
4								1

Sudoku is a number-placing puzzle based on a 9x9 grid with several given numbers. The object is to place the numbers 1 to 9 in the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the same number only once. The difficulty level of the Conceptis Sudoku increases from Monday to Saturday.

Difficulty Level ★★ 12/13

Yesterday's Answer

7	2	4	9	3	1	6	8	5
9	6	3	4	8	5	2	1	7
8	1	5	2	6	7	4	3	9
1	5	9	6	7	4	3	2	8
4	3	7	1	2	8	9	5	6
2	8	6	3	5	9	1	7	4
5	4	2	8	9	3	7	6	1
6	7	1	5	4	2	8	9	3
3	9	8	7	1	6	5	4	2

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WONDERWORD®

By DAVID OUELLET

HOW TO PLAY: All the words listed below appear in the puzzle — horizontally, vertically, diagonally and even backward. Find them, circle each letter of the word and strike it off the list. The leftover letters spell the **WONDERWORD.**

BUILDING THE PERFECT NEST Solution: 3 letters

S	H	A	P	E	R	U	T	A	R	E	P	M	E	T
E	P	R	O	T	E	C	T	E	K	S	A	B	C	W
L	E	A	R	U	F	S	D	E	E	S	G	K	N	I
T	N	Y	R	A	N	A	C	H	T	N	L	F	E	N
S	V	E	E	R	T	S	B	R	I	I	A	L	F	E
I	I	Ⓜ	Ⓤ	Ⓓ	O	S	A	R	S	W	Y	O	C	E
R	R	H	F	I	O	W	P	B	I	A	E	W	I	G
B	O	T	L	F	O	S	E	L	I	C	R	E	R	A
R	N	M	T	O	U	W	D	S	N	R	S	R	C	L
A	M	R	L	G	R	L	I	O	E	I	D	S	U	F
N	E	A	I	E	I	Z	F	Y	O	V	B	S	L	U
C	N	W	D	F	E	E	D	E	R	W	A	O	A	O
H	T	I	E	V	A	E	W	E	A	T	H	E	R	M
E	P	E	B	B	L	E	S	N	E	H	C	I	L	A
S	H	R	E	D	D	E	D	N	O	I	H	S	U	C

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Basket, Birds, Branches, Bristles, Camouflage, Canary, Circular, Cushion, Environment, Fabric, Feeder, Fence, Flowers, Fluff, Fur, Layers, Leaves, Lichen, Mud, Pebbles, Protect, Robin, Seeds, Shape, Shredded, Size, Soft, Soil, Sparrow, Spiderweb Silk, Spring, Straw, Temperature, Tree, Twig, Twine, Warmth, Weather, Weave, Wildlife, Wood, Wool

Yesterday's Answer: Straws

To purchase **THE COLLECTED WONDERWORD, Volumes 56 through 70,** order online at www.WonderWordBooks.com.

Hurts, Eagles secure playoff spot, thump rival Giants, 48-22

EAST RUTHERFORD, N.J. (AP)—Jalen Hurts threw for two touchdowns and ran for another as the NFL-best Philadelphia Eagles punched their ticket to the playoffs with a 48-22 victory over the fading New York Giants on Sunday.

Hurts threw for 217 yards and hit DaVonta Smith on a 41-yard fourth-down TD strike and A.J. Brown on a 33-yarder as the Eagles (12-1) scored on their first three possessions. The third-year quarterback also ran for 77 yards, highlighted by a 10-yard TD scamper late in the third quarter.

Miles Sanders ran for 144 yards and scored on runs of 3 and 40 yards as the Eagles handed the Giants their worst loss under first-year coach Brian Daboll. Philadelphia secured its second straight postseason appearance and fifth in six seasons.

The Eagles finished with seven sacks, including three by Brandon Graham.

Daniel Jones and Tyrod Taylor threw touchdown passes for for the Giants (7-5-1). They have one win in their last six games (1-4-1) and their hopes of their first playoff berth since 2016 are slipping with four games remaining.

The Eagles, who have the league's second-ranked defense and third-ranked offense, dominated from the start. They sacked Jones twice on the opening series and Hurts then took over, driving them 84 and 91 yards for touchdowns.

AP

Philadelphia Eagles quarterback Jalen Hurts (1) is congratulated by wide receiver Quez Watkins (16) after scoring a touchdown against the New York Giants during the third quarter of an NFL football game, Sunday, Dec. 11, 2022, in East Rutherford, N.J.

Chargers 23, Dolphins 17

In Inglewood, Calif., Justin Herbert threw for 367 yards and a touchdown and Los Angeles' short-handed defense frustrated Miami's Tua Tagovailoa.

The Chargers (7-6) moved into position for the final AFC playoff berth, ahead of the New York Jets.

Herbert completed a career-high 39 passes on 51 attempts for his 21st 300-yard game. He became the first NFL quarterback to throw for 13,000 yards in his first three seasons.

Tyreek Hill scored two touchdowns for the Dolphins, one of them on an improbable recovery of Jeff Wilson Jr.'s fumble that Hill took 57 yards to the end zone. But Tagovailoa had his worst game as an NFL starter, completing 10 of 28 passes for 145 yards and a touchdown as the Dolphins (8-5) lost their second straight.

49ers 35, Buccaneers 7

In Santa Clara, Calif., Brock Purdy threw two touchdown passes and ran for another score in his first career start and San Francisco's vaunted defense spoiled Tom Brady's Bay Area homecoming.

Purdy outplaying the NFL's most accomplished quarterback ever was partially overshadowed by another key injury for the 49ers (9-4).

A week after losing quarterback Jimmy Garoppolo to a broken left foot that opened the door for Purdy to start, the Niners lost star receiver Deebo Samuel to an ankle injury that forced him to be taken off the field in tears on a cart.

That was about the only thing that didn't go right for the 49ers, who thoroughly dominated Brady and Tampa Bay (6-7) to win their sixth straight game. The last pick in the 2022 draft led the Niners to five touchdowns on their first seven possessions.

Lions 34, Vikings 23

In Detroit, Jared Goff threw for 330 yards and three touchdowns, leading surging Detroit past NFC North-leading Minnesota.

The Vikings (10-3) needed a win or tie to clinch the division title. Kirk Cousins threw for 425 yards, including a franchise-record 223 to Justin Jefferson on 11 catches. But Dalvin Cook ran for just 23 yards on 15 carries, and Minnesota couldn't stop Goff.

Detroit (6-7) has won five of six, its best stretch since its last postseason appearance in 2016.

Goff completed 27 of 39 passes. He started the scoring with a 41-yard touchdown pass to Jameson Williams, his first catch since injuring his left knee 11 months ago playing for Alabama in the NCAA national championship game.

Bills 20, Jets 12

In Orchard Park, N.Y., Josh Allen threw a touchdown pass and ran for a score on consecutive possessions and Buffalo beat AFC East rival New York in wet, chilly and windy conditions.

Allen's 24-yard touchdown pass to Dawson Knox in the closing minute of the second quarter led to Buffalo scoring on four consecutive drives, capped by a pair of field goals by Tyler Bass, including a 49-yarder.

The AFC-leading Bills (10-3) won their fourth straight since a two-game skid, which included a 20-17 loss at the Jets. Buffalo has won at least 10 of its first 13 games for the seventh time in franchise history.

The Jets (7-6) have lost four of six, a slump that has made their playoff chances shaky. New York hasn't qualified for the postseason since 2010.

Jaguars 36, Titans 22

In Nashville, Tenn., Trevor Lawrence threw for a career-high 368 yards and three touchdowns and ran for a score, and Jacksonville won at Tennessee for the first time since 2013.

The Jaguars (5-8) snapped a five-game skid against their oldest division rival with just their second victory in this series in 11 games. Doug Pederson became the first Jacksonville coach to win in Nashville since Gus Bradley on Nov. 10, 2013.

Jacksonville had four sacks and turned four turnovers into 20 points — three for 17 points in the first half. The Jaguars scored 29 straight points and have won two of three.

Jaguars tight end Evan Engram caught 11 passes for a career-high 162 yards and had two TD receptions.

The Titans (7-6) lost their third straight, matching their longest skid since coach Mike Vrabel's opening season in 2018. Derrick Henry ran for 96 yards and a touchdown in the first quarter but didn't do much after that, finishing with 121 yards on 17 carries.

Cowboys 27, Texans 23

In Arlington, Texas, Ezekiel Elliott scored the go-ahead touchdown with 41 seconds remaining and Dallas rallied to beat hapless Houston.

Houston (1-11-1) appeared in position to end a seven-game losing streak after Dak Prescott threw an interception inside the Dallas 10 with 5:37 to go and the Texans leading by three.

The Cowboys (10-3) stiffened against a makeshift Texans offense, stuffing backup quarterback Jeff Driskel on a fourth-down run to give Prescott another shot starting just outside his own goal line.

The star quarterback delivered, starting with a 21-yard completion to Dalton Schultz from the 2. Later, an 18-yarder to Schultz put Dallas at the Houston 4. Elliott scored on third down from the 2 to cap the 98-yard, 11-play drive.

Tony Pollard scored twice for Dallas, which stayed two games behind Philadelphia in the NFC East.

Bengals 23, Browns 10

In Cincinnati, Joe Burrow shook off a sloppy start to throw two touchdown passes and Cincinnati ended a five-game skid to its Ohio rival.

The Bengals (9-4) have won five straight and nine of 11 and remained tied for the AFC North lead with Baltimore. Burrow picked up his first win in five starts against the Browns (5-8), whose playoff hopes are now all but nonexistent.

Cleveland quarterback Deshaun Watson was sharper than in his debut with the team last week and threw his first touchdown pass in 707 days, a 13-yarder to David Njoku in the third quarter.

But Watson also threw an interception and two incompletions on fourth down in the fourth quarter. Watson finished 26 of 42 for 276 yards, and the Bengals bottled up Cleveland running backs Nick Chubb and Kareem Hunt.

Burrow threw a 15-yard TD pass to Ja'Marr Chase and a 45yard scoring pass on a flea-flicker to Trenton Irwin. Burrow was largely reliant on Chase after his other top receivers, Tyler Boyd and Tee Higgins, left the game with injuries. Chase had 10 receptions for 119 yards in his second game since missing a month with a hip fracture.

Chiefs 34, Broncos 28

In Denver, L'Jarius Sneed intercepted Denver backup quarterback Brett Rypien late in the fourth quarter, and Patrick Mahomes atoned for a three-interception day by leading Kansas City on a clock-chewing drive.

The Broncos (3-10) lost QB Russell Wilson to a concussion, and the Chiefs (10-3) won their 14th straight over their rival.

Denver made a game of it by scoring three touchdowns in a 3 1/2-minute stretch spanning halftime after falling behind 27-0.

Mahomes threw for 352 yards and three touchdowns, including a no-look hook pass on one of Jerick McKinnon's two TD receptions.

Jerry Jeudy caught three touchdown passes for Denver, the last one from Rypien after Wilson took a hard hit on a 14-yard scramble to the Kansas City 2 early in the fourth quarter. Wilson was escorted off the field and the Broncos ruled him out with a concussion shortly thereafter.

Ravens 16, Steelers 14

In Pittsburgh, J.K. Dobbins ran for 120 yards and a touchdown in his return from a knee injury, and Baltimore overcame the loss of backup quarterback Tyler Huntley to beat AFC North rival Pittsburgh.

Huntley filled in for injured star Lamar Jackson but entered the concussion protocol in the second half. He was replaced by undrafted rookie Anthony Brown.

Justin Tucker kicked three field goals to help division-leading Baltimore (9-4) end a four-game losing streak to the Steelers, who also lost their quarterback, Kenny Pickett, to concussion protocol.

Brown spent most of his quarter-plus of play handing off to Dobbins or Gus Edwards while the Steelers self-destructed. Baltimore ran for 215 yards, the most Pittsburgh (5-8) has allowed since giving up 249 to the Ravens in the 2021 regular-season finale.

Pittsburgh lost Pickett to a concussion in the first half, and backup Mitch Trubisky threw three interceptions in Baltimore territory as the Steelers fell out of realistic playoff contention.

Panthers 30, Seahawks 24

In Seattle, Chuba Hubbard and Raheem Blackshear both had rushing touchdowns, Sam Darnold threw a TD pass, and Carolina beat Seattle to stay in the thick of the NFC South race.

Carolina (5-8) built leads of 17-0 and 20-7 to take advantage of a sloppy first-half performance by the Seahawks (7-6). In the second half, the Panthers simply ran through Seattle's defense and delivered a blow to the Seahawks' hopes of winning the NFC West.

Carolina (5-8) won for the third time in four games, pulled even with Atlanta and moved within one game of NFC South-leading Tampa Bay after the Buccaneers lost at West-leading San Francisco.

Seattle couldn't stop Hubbard, Blackshear and D'Onta Foreman on the ground. Carolina rushed for 223 yards, with 180 coming from those three backs. Foreman and Hubbard each had 74 yards.

Hubbard's 2-yard TD run early in the second quarter gave Carolina a 17-0 lead and Blackshear's 8-yard run with 6:57 remaining made it 27-17. Blackshear's TD capped a drive where Carolina ran on eight of 10 plays and gained 68 of its 74 yards on the ground.

Embiid scores 53, leads 76ers to 131-113 win over Hornets

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Joel Embiid had 53 points and 11 rebounds, leading the Philadelphia 76ers to a 131-113 win over the Charlotte Hornets on Sunday night.

With the home crowd serenading him with MVP! chants, Embiid became the first player in the NBA this season to post two 50-plus point performances, adding Sunday's performance to a league-best 59-point effort on Nov. 13 against Utah.

"The ball just found me," Embiid said. "I thought we moved the ball well all night and the ball just found me."

Embiid became the third player in Sixers history to have multiple 50-point games in the same season, joining Allen Iverson (2000-01 and 2004-05) and Wilt Chamberlain (1965-66 and 1967-68). It is also the 30th game in Embiid's career with 40 points and 10 rebounds. The only other player in franchise history to accomplish that feat was Chamberlain.

"We won," Embiid said. "It's good to do that when you win. ... I'm just happy that I'm contributing when we are winning."

James Harden had 19 points, 16 assists, and nine rebounds to help Embiid's effort.

"He was in attack mode for the entire game," Harden said. "He made scoring look easy tonight. He was aggressive getting to the basket and his jumper was falling."

Tobias Harris scored 17 points and De'Anthony Melton added 12 for Philadelphia, which shot 55.4%.

"We didn't run, but we played with pace and got open shots," Sixers coach Doc Rivers said.

Charlotte was led by Kelly Oubre Jr. and Terry Rozier, who each scored 29 points. The Hornets have lost five straight games.

AP

Philadelphia 76ers' Joel Embiid, left, dunks past Charlotte Hornets' Kelly Oubre Jr. during the first half of an NBA basketball game, Sunday, Dec. 11, 2022, in Philadelphia.

"We had good intent tonight," Hornets coach Steve Clifford said. "The first six or seven minutes of the game, we had good defense. Our transition defense was a problem tonight and we have to fix that. Besides Joel, that was the story of the first half. But we did a lot of good things."

Embiid took the game over in the final three minutes of the second quarter, scoring 15 of his 28 first-half points in that stretch by exploiting a mismatch against Hornets forward Mason Plumlee. On one play, Embiid drove down the left side of the lane from the foul line, extended high over Plumlee and threw down a thunderous dunk that charged up the Wells Fargo Center crowd. It was part of a three straight possessions stretch that ended with Embiid scoring and going to the line for the old-fashioned 3-point play.

"We have a saying that you have to feed the hot hand," Embiid said. "... You got to keep feeding them until the defense stops it once or twice or three times in that situation. I just kept scoring and they just kept giving me the ball."

The Hornets (7-20) stayed within striking distance through the early part of the fourth quarter, thanks to Oubre and Rozier, who were able to drive the lane and get easy looks while being helped by 15 offensive rebounds.

But Embiid put the game out of reach by scoring 14 points in the fourth quarter before being pulled with two minutes left. He finished 20 for 32 from the field and hit all 11 of his free throws.

Lakers 124, Pistons 117

In Detroit, LeBron James scored 35 points, Anthony Davis had 34 points and 15 rebounds and Los Angeles beat Detroit to end a three-game losing streak.

Davis also had seven assists as the Lakers overcame 38 points from Bojan Bogdanovic. Lonnie Walker IV added 18 points for Los Angeles and Russell Westbrook had 11 points and nine assists.

Rookie Jaden Ivey had 16 points for Detroit. The Pistons have lost three in a row.

Rockets 97, Bucks 92

In Houston, Jalen Green had 30 points and seven rebounds, Kevin Porter Jr. added 18 points and seven assists and Houston beat Milwaukee to extend its home-winning streak to four games.

Houston was coached by assistant coach John Lucas with head coach Stephen Silas away from the team following the death of father and long-time NBA player and coach Paul Silas.

Jrue Holiday had 25 points and eight assists for Milwaukee, Bobby Portis added 17 points and 15 rebounds and Giannis Antetokounmpo had 16 points and 18 rebounds. The Bucks had won four in a row.

Pelicans 129, Suns 124, OT

In New Orleans, Zion Williamson scored 35 points and New Orleans beat short-handed Phoenix in overtime for its seventh straight victory.

CJ McCollum added 29 for the Pelicans, who beat the Suns — playing without star guard Devin Booker because of tightness in his left hamstring — for the second time in three days and won for the 12th time in their last 14 games as they've surged to the Western Conference lead.

Deandre Ayton had 28 points and 12 rebounds for Phoenix, but fouled out on Williamson's drive with New Orleans clinging to a two-point lead in the final minute of regulation. Mikal Bridges scored 27 points for Phoenix.

Hawks 123, Bulls 122, OT

In Atlanta, A.J. Griffin hit a 6-footer on an alley-oop pass at the overtime buzzer and Atlanta beat Chicago to snap a three-game losing streak,

DeMar DeRozan made three free throws with 0.5 seconds remaining in overtime to finish with 33 points and give the Bulls the lead,

But Griffin took the alley-oop pass from Jalen Johnson on the sideline and scored on a turnaround jumper.

Bogdan Bogdanovic scored 17 of his 28 points in the first half for Atlanta. Trae Young had 19 points and 14 assists.

Knicks 112, Kings 99

In New York, Julius Randle and RJ Barrett each scored 27 points and New York beat Sacramento for its winning streak to a season-high four games.

Randle had all 27 points by halftime, then was ejected with 3:35 left in the third quarter after arguing a non-call and receiving two technical fouls.

Domantas Sabonis led Sacramento with 20 points. The Kings were held under 100 points for the first time this season.

Magic 111, Raptors 99

In Orlando, Fla., Franz Wagner scored 23 points, Paolo Banchero added 20 points and 12 rebounds and Orlando beat Toronto for its third straight victory.

Orlando's last three-game winning streak was in February 2021.

Gary Trent Jr. led Toronto with 24 points.

'I want to talk': Griner opened up during her long trip home

WASHINGTON (AP)—WNBA star Brittney Griner didn't want any alone time as soon as she boarded a U.S. government plane that would bring her home.

"I have been in prison for 10 months now, listening to Russian. I want to talk," Griner said, according to Roger Carstens, the special presidential envoy for hostage affairs, who helped secure the basketball star's release and bring her back to the U.S. last week.

She then asked Carstens, referring to others on the plane: "But, first of all, who are these guys?"

"And she moved right past me and went to every member on that crew, looked them in the eyes, shook their hands and asked about them, got their names, making a personal connection with them," Carstens recalled in an interview on CNN's "State of the Union." "It was really amazing."

Ultimately, Griner spent about 12 hours of an 18-hour flight talking with others on the plane, Carstens said. The two-time Olympic gold medalist and Phoenix Mercury pro basketball star spoke about her time in the Russian penal colony and her months in captivity, Carstens recalled, although he declined to go into specific details.

"I was left with the impression this is an intelligent, passionate, compassionate, humble, interesting person, a patriotic person," Carstens said. "But above all, authentic. I hate the fact that I had to meet her in this manner, but I actually felt blessed having had a chance to get to know her."

Although Griner is undergoing a full medical and mental evaluation, Carstens said she appeared "full of energy, looked fantastic."

Griner, who also played pro basketball in Russia, was arrested at Moscow's Sheremetyevo Airport in February after Russian authorities said she was carrying vape canisters with cannabis oil. The U.S. State Department declared Griner to be "wrongfully detained" — a charge that Russia has sharply rejected.

President Joe Biden announced on Thursday that the U.S. had secured Griner's release. In exchange, the administration offered Russia the release of notorious arms dealer Viktor Bout, who had been serving a 25-year sentence on charges that he conspired to sell tens of millions of dollars in weapons that U.S officials said were to be used against Americans.

But the U.S. was unable to secure the freedom of Paul Whelan, who has been held in Russia for nearly four years. Administration officials have stressed repeatedly that they are still working to release Whelan, whom Russian officials have jailed on espionage charges that both his family and the U.S. government say are baseless.

"They hold Mr. Whelan differently because of these espionage charges," John Kirby, a spokesman for the National Security Council, said Sunday on ABC's "This Week." "So we're working through that now. We are now more informed, clearly having gone through this process over the last few months. We're more informed. We have a better sense of the context here, where the Russia's expectations are and we're just going to keep working on it."

Carstens, the U.S. government's top hostage negotiator, said "there's always cards" to play in securing an offer for Whelan and said he spoke with the jailed American on Friday.

"Here's what I told him. I said, 'Paul, you have the commitment of this president. The president's focused. The secretary of state's focused. I'm certainly focused, and we're going to bring you home,'" Carstens said. "And I reminded him, I said, 'Paul, when you were in the Marines, and I was in the Army, they always reminded you, keep the faith.' And I said, 'Keep the faith. We're coming to get you.'"

Nickole bags 2 more golds

By MARK RABAGO
mark_rabago@saipantribune.com
ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Nickole Salem won two more gold medals in the Jiu Jitsu World League Competition held last Nov. 19 at Osceola Heritage Park Event Center in Florida.

The then 5-year-old—she turned 6 this month—went up against nine competitors in the 40-49-lb division in the Gi and No-Gi.

"Nickole was the youngest competitor at 5 years old in her division fighting against 6- and 7-year-olds. She finished all her matches with submission and secured two gold medals," said Salem's father Nicko.

The Jiu Jitsu World League Competition will be the younger Salem's last major competition of the year, according to Nicko, so she can focus on her physical growth in a higher weight bracket.

"She'll be turning 6 years old in December and it's time for her to grow," he said.

Despite the expected layoff, Nicko doesn't see her daughter slowing down in her passion for the martial arts.

"Nickole is not showing any signs of wanting to stop jiu jitsu. If anything she is enjoying it more now than she's ever had. She recently started wrestling classes and it's helped a lot with her grappling.Nickole loves both sports and might have her compete in wrestling tournaments soon when the season opens up in December."

Besides, it's as if Nickole's parents are just making her do jiu jitsu all the time.

"As parents we keep her interested in the sport by including some incentives like travel and visiting attractions around the area of the competition. Nickole loves seeing kid museums and exploring cities. Her competitiveness comes from reaching her dreams of becoming a black belt one day and opening her own gym. That's a crazy dream for a 5-year-old, but we feel it's attainable in the future. Whatever it is she desires to do in life, we will be here to support her," said Nicko.

The elder Salem is a 2012 graduate of Saipan Southern High School, while his wife and Nickole's mother, Maria Victoria, is an alumnae of Marianas High School.

CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Nickole Salem poses outside the Osceola Heritage Park Event Center in Florida after winning two bronze medals in the Jiu Jitsu World League Competition last Nov. 19.

ANOTHER

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finish in the time trial, Spaeth remained humble after thundering to third in the road race.

"Going into Pacific Cup events, I was not anticipating being able to podium, so I was thrilled with my third place finishes. By the end of the 105K race, I was not concerned with my ranking but striving to finish. It was a beautiful course, but my legs and mind were ready to be done."

She said overall the weather and road conditions cooperated and were ideal during their stay in Guam.

"On both days, we were pretty fortunate with good conditions. There was a strong headwind during the time trials, but for a short race, it was bearable. For the 105K, there were a lot of light showers, but that helped keep the temperatures down. I was surprised that the roads still felt really safe and not slippery, even with all of the wet conditions."

Spaeth dedicated her two bronze medals to her family, friends, and the Northern Mariana Islands Cycling Federation.

"My husband, Travis Spaeth, has been so amazing and supportive of me as I train for different events. Additionally, I am fortunate to have a fantastic group of biking friends who motivate and train with me on long, early morning rides. And a big thank you to NMICF and Jay Dicyo for inviting and encouraging me to participate," said the native of North Dakota,.

Diyco, NMICF official and Team NMI manager, again congratulated Spaeth for her second bronze medal and also thanked Oceania Cycling Confederation for organizing the Inaugural Pacific Cup. He also thanked people behind the Tour of Guam, which was held simultaneously with the Pacific Cup.

"I would like to thank the Oceania Cycling Confederation for hosting the Pacific Cup. It is good that we had this event after 27 years. To the organizing committee of the Tour of Guam 2022 thank you very much for the great event.

Diyco added that Team NMI had to hurdle a lot of obstacles and was happy that Spaeth was able to bring home two bronze medals.

"We had to overcome a lot of challenges like unfamiliarity of the course, short preparation, and especially age factor. I think we had the oldest team in both the Pacific Cup and Tour of Guam."

Team NMI to the Pacific Cup and Tour of Guam would like to thank NMICF, headed by Vince Seman, the Oceania Cycling Confederation, Bridge Capital LLC, and AK Toyota for sponsoring them in their trip to Guam.

Making up the NMI team to the Pacific Cup were Spaeth, Kathy Ruszala, Willy Barbo, Cesar Fortaleza, and Nomer Mangalinao, while Rusty Valino, Jojo Valencia, Nelson Pagaduan, Florence Antonio, and Diyco represented the CNMI in the Tour of Guam.

TANG

From Page 20

first place winner is Saipan International School with 123 votes; second place is Marianas High School with 35 votes; and Grace Christian Academy is third with 17 votes.

For the Half Marathon, Run Saipan also recognized the club members' Top 3 men's finishers: Sildrey Veloria, Matthew Furan, and Travis Spaeth. The Top 3 women's members went to Rosemarie Chisato, An Bang, and Jessica Ortizo.

Additionally, a special "Run Saipan President's Inspiration Award" went to Simon Necesito, as he crawled to the finish line after his legs gave out in the Half Marathon. Run Saipan emphasized that this is a one-time award only in the event that someone does something inspirational or noteworthy in their runs.

The "Oldest Participant Award" went to Gerald Alm, who is 74 years old and finished the half marathon with a time of 2:58:20. Overall, a total of 363 participated in the two simultaneous events held by Run Saipan, with 71 runners for the Half Marathon and 292 for the 5.5K Fun Run.

Alex Yap, president of Atkins Kroll, said after the event, "We are most grateful to Run Saipan and our race participants for making the Holiday Half Marathon and 5.5K Fun Run majorly successful.This occasion is especially meaningful as we commemorate 55 years of service in Saipan. We could not have hoped for a better way to celebrate than to gather with our island residents in the spirit of health, wellness, and the longevity of life. After all, AK is 'Here for Saipan. Here for Life.' Thank you to all our volunteers and supporting organizations who helped make this a successful event."

Kevin Barnes, Atkins Kroll Saipan sales manager, said during the event, "Run Saipan works very hard. They're very good at what they do. We expected to have in the 200s but they by far exceeded our expectations… we're completely happy with the turnout, with everybody's support, and with Run Saipan and their effort on this. This is just the first year, and every year we hope to grow and grow… so if anybody missed it this year, we hope to see them next year."

Run Saipan president Edward Dela Cruz Jr, said, "The Run Saipan Holiday Half Marathon and 5.5K Fun Run was an amazing event that couldn't have happened without the partnership and fellowship between Run Saipan and Atkins Kroll. It was a successful event because of the teamwork between both companies and it would not have happened without the volunteers and support of the entire community. It really goes to show how much Atkins Kroll provides service to Run Saipan and the CNMI."

Additionally, Run Saipan posted on their Facebook page, "Thank you to everyone who participated in our Inaugural Run Saipan Holiday Half Marathon and AK 5.5K community fun run presented by Atkins Kroll Saipan. Thank you to Atkins Kroll and their president Alex Yap for partnering with us to bring a new explosive and fun race to the CNMI. We thank all our partners who made this event possible. Congratulations and strong work to all the runners and hard working volunteers and people who made this event possible."

Thank you also to the outstanding organizations who made this life-changing experience for people possible: Northern Marianas Athletics, HongYe Hardware, IT&E CNMI, DTE Endurance, ONETIME.sport, Aqua Resort Club Saipan, The Marianas, Northern Marianas College, American Red Cross-Northern Mariana Islands Chapter, NMI Triathlon Federation, CNMI Department of Public Safety, Saipan Mayor's Office, Marianas High School Dolphin Battalion, Commonwealth Healthcare Corp., CNMI Department of Fire And Emergency Medical Services, Commonwealth Ports Authority Aircraft Rescue Firefighting, Saipan International School, Crowne Plaza Resort Saipan, 9th Mission Support Command, Saipan Paddling Club, Marianas Rugby Club, Saipan Community School, and the "Finasisu Mistisu" L.J. Castro.

MBAPPÉ

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against the standout talent in the tournament-best defense that has conceded just once, and it was an own-goal.

It was the beginning of a beautiful friendship when the Moroccan player joined Mbappé at PSG in July 2021 from Inter Milan for a transfer fee reported to be 60 million euros ($63 million).

Two young men born within several weeks of each other in 1998 — just a few months after France won its first World Cup title — soon got along.

Hakimi has talked of how they share the same tastes in music and video games, and that Mbappé helps his Madrid-born friend learn French.

Hakimi is a devout Muslim and for the Eid Mubarak holiday this year they teamed up for a video shared by their club. Hakimi guided Mbappé, who has family ties to Morocco's north African neighbor Algeria, through tasting food from the Arab region.

On the field for the French champion, they have a series of rehearsed handshakes and goal celebrations. Playing for PSG gives them many opportunities.

"It's easy to play with a player like him," Hakimi has said of Mbappé. "To give him the ball, knowing that he will make the difference."

Mbappé has been the difference at this World Cup, especially when he score twice in wins over Denmark in the group stage and Poland in the round of 16.

In the quarterfinals on Saturday, Mbappé was kept in check about as much as is possible by England's speedy right back Kyle Walker. He got just one clear shooting chance that went high and wide.

Still, he was involved in the move that led to France's first goal in a 2-1 win and the decisive late winner followed a corner on the left flank that he helped create.

Morocco's defense has stood like an immovable force and all its European opponents so far — Croatia, Belgium, Spain and Portugal — failed to score in four full games plus extra time for the Spanish.

Hakimi has helped limit Morocco's opponents to just 10 goal attempts on target combined, according to FIFA post-game statistics. Canada got an own-goal from defender Nayef Aguerd in a 2-1 win for Morocco.

Mbappé, meanwhile, has had 10 shots on target just by himself for a France team whose 11-goal total is the best of the four semifinalists.

At Al Khor Stadium on Wednesday, Mbappé continues pursuing his goal of being the youngest player besides Pelé to have two World Cup titles. France can become the first to retain its title since Pelé and Brazil in 1962.

Hakimi wants to be among the first African players to reach a World Cup final. That would be against either Croatia or Argentina, whose star Lionel Messi also plays for Qatar-owned PSG.

May the best friend win.

Hurts, Eagles secure playoff spot, thump rival Giants, 48-22

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Sports

Nickole bags 2 more golds

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CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
Robyn Spaeth triumphantly crosses the finish line at the Guam Museum Park last Sunday after coming in third in the road race of the Inaugural Pacific Cup.

Another podium finish for Spaeth in '22 Pacific Cup

By MARK RABAGO
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ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Robyn Spaeth came home with not one but two bronze medals in her carryon upon arrival yesterday at the Francisco C. Ada-Saipan International Airport from Guam where she added a third place finish in the road race of the Inaugural Pacific Cup.

The 39-year-old Marianas High School teacher on Sunday negotiated the 105-kilometer course that started and finished at the Guam Museum Park in 3:54:32.5.

That was good enough for third place in the Oceania Cycling Confederation event that had New Caledonia powerhouse cyclists Celine Hirzel (3:28:26.0) and (3:42:03.6) come in first and second, which is the same order of last Friday's time trial where Spaeth also came in third.

Like her bronze medal-

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Tang, Chavez top 5.5K Fun Run

By LEIGH GASES
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CORRESPONDENT

Pony Tang and Andrei Kaithlyn Chavez—both high school student-athletes—dominated 290 other runners in the 5.5K Fun Run presented by Atkins Kroll and Run Saipan in celebration of AK's 55 years of service last Saturday at Banzai Cliff in Marpi.

Tang, a 16-year-old from Marianas High School and member of the MHS Run Club, raced through the finish line first overall with a time of 23:03, while Chavez from Saipan International School clocked in first in the women's division with a time of 25:09.

Right behind Tang is MHS' Cody Shimizu with a time of 24:42, followed by David Zhao with a time of 24:30.

Second to Chavez in the women's division is Noriko Jim with a time of 25:27 and third is Addalee Taflinger with a time of 26:12.

Tang said that the course was "good. It was just really hilly and the wind was really strong." He then thanked his friends, his teachers, and coaches and hopes to "encourage running in MHS and hopefully I get more people to join next time."

Chavez, whose father raced in the Holiday Half Marathon, said that she didn't join the half marathon race because she is "not that fit." Even with that, she topped the women's category in the 5.5K race. She recounted that she wasn't leading in the race the whole time as she had to catch up with some runners throughout the race.

"It was a good course. I had to stop because the tracker was falling down… I had to stop, then run, and the girl would beat me and I had to sprint to her." Chavez also said that she was running alongside her schoolmate, Tiana Cabrera, but decided to just make a run for it in the end.

The school participation

See TANG on Page 19

Tang

Chavez

Mbappé to face good friend Hakimi in World Cup semifinal

By GRAHAM DUNBAR
AP SPORTS WRITER

DOHA, Qatar (AP)—Kylian Mbappé is going to meet his good friend Achraf Hakimi again at this World Cup.

Not like the first time in Qatar last week, when the France star went to visit his Paris Saint-Germain teammate at the Morocco team hotel in downtown Doha.

On Wednesday, Mbappé will be marked by Hakimi in a World Cup semifinal—his path to Morocco's well-defended goal down the French left wing blocked by a player he rates highly.

"ACHRAF HAKIMI. BEST RB IN THE WORLD," Mbappé wrote in English on his Twitter account in January, referring to the right back position Hakimi occupies for club and country.

It is a high-level duel as both approach a World Cup summit that would be historic for either team.

Mbappé versus Hakimi—the tournament's top scorer with five goals in five games

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AP
PSG's Kylian Mbappe, left, celebrates with teammate Achraf Hakimi after scoring his side's second goal during a French League One soccer match between Brest and PSG at the Francis-Le Ble stadium in Brest, France, Friday, Aug. 20, 2021.